



The Framing of Fundamentalist Christians:  
Network Television News, 1980-2000

By

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

University of Washington

2002

Program Authorized to Offer Degree: School of Communications

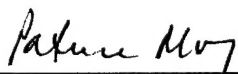
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Abstract

The Framing of Fundamentalist Christians:

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by Peter A. Kerr

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Scientific study of the mass media's depiction of religion has been paltry, and its results are often confusing and conflicting. This research assumes more clarity of the media's depiction can be obtained by dividing religion into its various faith groups, and then dividing the faith groups into more accurate segments along sectarian or doctrinal lines. Using this more focused method, the present research assesses the nightly national network news' portrayal of fundamentalist Christians between the years 1980 and 2000. As Fundamentalists have often claimed a bias in the media, this study probes for both explicit and implicit portrayals, examining the issues used by the media to frame discussions and the overall impression news clips offer about Fundamentalists. Results show Fundamentalists are reported in a consistently, but mildly negative manner. Politics is often the main focus of newscasts involving Fundamentalists, and conflict has been the most prevalent news value. While often portrayed as being somewhat intolerant, racist, violent and prone to impose their views upon others, Fundamentalists are also depicted as being somewhat patriotic. Differences between the networks are also discussed, and the broadcast data are compared with similar data regarding U.S. newspaper coverage of Fundamentalists, with little variation between the two noted. Finally, future research is suggested to not only better understand the portrayal of Fundamentalist Christians in society, but also, through the use of similar focused content analyses, to be able to compare this data with other denominations and religions, obtaining a better nuanced and clarified picture of the overall portrayal of religion by the mass media.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A special thanks is due to Assistant Professor Patricia Moy and the other members of my committee for their insightful advice and assistance, as well as to Erica Siegl for her help coding the news clips. I would also like to express my gratitude to the United States Air Force, and especially to those at the Air Force Institute of Technology and in the Public Affairs career field, for their administrative assistance and confidence in selecting me to earn a Masters degree. Finally, and most significantly, I'd like to express my appreciation to my wife Rebecca Joy Kerr, for her time, support and love during this research.

## DEDICATION

I hereby dedicate this work to Truth, for there is no point searching, and certainly no point in researching, unless we can know the Truth or at least advance our knowledge to get a better approximation thereof. Though I recognize full well this is a very small step toward Truth, it has been a significant step in my journey.

## The Framing of Fundamentalist Christians:

### Network Television News, 1980-2000

Fundamentalist Christianity is at the heart of many of today's most heated debates, ranging from the relationship between church and state to the proper media depiction of America's historically dominant religion now that the United States is increasingly becoming a pluralistic society (Carpenter, 1997; Shultze, 1990a). This debate begins with extrapolations as to the true faiths and intentions of America's founding fathers and ends with different definitions of constitutional rights and different visions for America's moral and political future. Indeed, this debate has often been couched in terms of conflict, as people refer to the American "culture wars" between the more traditional conservatives who wish America to continue in the proven ways of the past and the progressive liberals who would cut loose older bonds and forge forward into a boundless future. The goal of this war is not destruction but the dream of future prosperity, and the weapons are not explosives and bullets but ideas and words, presumably those conveyed through the mass media. The tactics do not involve killing people but winning the hearts and minds of the masses, and in this cold war the weapon of mass destruction is adept interaction with the mass media.

Academic prognosis as to the role of the media in this war varies, with very few regarding the media's position as neutral. Even the term "media" is much too broad to generalize. Not only are there many different methods of delivering mass communications with their own peculiarities and potential biases, but also the media themselves are far from being monolithic, beholden of a universal position on the matter. Furthermore, research has found that the more importance an issue has to an individual, the less they trust the media will handle the issue responsibly (Gunther, 1988). Religion is presumably one area that many regard as important, with a polarization such that many wish it played a larger role while others wish it to play a lesser role in public life.

In a nation that was founded by Christian seekers of religious freedom (pilgrims), both Christianity and religious toleration were around long before the Constitution. Thus in today's debate both sides seem to stand upon firm ground even when stating somewhat



contradictory positions, as one side claims America was founded as a Christian nation (Marshall & Manuel, 1980), while the other argues the nation was founded on religious tolerance (Murphy, 2001; Thomas, 1986).

Whatever its foundation, religion has played a key role in shaping America, both in an unofficial capacity as well as being demonstrated in official places such as the walls of the Supreme Court or the motto on coinage stating “in God we trust.” This has led to a unique status of religion in the U.S., as:

Not only are Americans a highly religious people, but, in contrast to the rest of the Western world, ours is also a country in which overt hostility to religion has not been legitimized by a tradition of anticlerical politics. Religion stands outside the established order, at least officially, and woe to those who treat it with disrespect. (Silk, 1995, p. 3)

However, many fundamentalist and other conservative Christians feel the media greatly disrespects religion. A 1993 Freedom Foundation report surveyed 529 clergy, and found 91 percent of “conservative Christian” clergy agreed that “most religion coverage today is biased against ministers and organized religion” (Dart & Allen, 1993, p. 35). These “conservative Christian” clergy reported this perception far more than other clergy members. Fundamentalist Christians have particularly expressed a sentiment that the media are hostile to their faith, claiming that ever since the Scopes trial debating the place of evolution in school curriculum, journalists have “depicted fundamentalists as anti-intellectual bumpkins from a bygone era” (Schultze, 1990a, p. 258). Indeed, a February 1993 *Washington Post* article claimed Fundamentalist Christian followers of Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson to be “largely poor, uneducated and easy to command” (Hoover, 1998, p. 52). This led to public outcry and a retraction in the *Washington Post* that admitted there was “no actual factual basis” for the statement (Hoover, 1998).

Thus far, however, the accusations have not been tested empirically. In fact, religion in general has been somewhat neglected by social scientists. “Academic research on the subject of religion and media is scant at best, suffering from a lack of interdisciplinary study” (Stout & Buddenbaum, 1996, p. 5). While sociology has

reviewed the theoretical development of religion, it has seldom paid attention to the role of the mass media. Mass communications researchers, on the other hand, rarely discuss religion when studying media effects (Stout & Buddenbaum, 1996). Compounding this difficulty is the diversity of religions, with much of the current media studies simply amalgamating all religions into a single variable (Buddenbaum, 1996). The present study is designed with the understanding that each individual religion, and possibly even each sect within a religion, may need to be treated separately to get a more accurate assessment of the media's portrayal and potential effects.

Realizing "Christianity" is too broad of a subject, comprising many different and often-conflicting beliefs and traditions, this study focuses on how the media portray Christian Fundamentalists. This group was chosen as it is one of the most vocal in its complaint about the "humanistic" agenda of the mass media, and yet it still makes up a significant portion of the U.S. population. Fundamentalist Christians also are interesting as they have reacted to the perceived media threat by making various forays into the mass media market themselves, and in a sense they have created their own subculture that may be perceived by the media to be subversive of, or at least in competition with, their marketing interests.

This research focuses on how fundamentalist Christians are portrayed on national nightly television news broadcasts between the years 1980-2000. This time period spans the emergence of the fundamentalistic "Christian Right" on the political scene, and ends with the election of their choice of presidential candidates. Furthermore, stopping short of 2001 prevents the study from being contaminated by potentially conflicting data that may have been generated by the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks, which while interesting, should be considered in a future study. In this study much attention is given to the historical and political background of Christian Fundamentalism to further understanding of the interplay between religion and culture.

Rather than simply answering the question of how television has portrayed Christian Fundamentalists, this research goes further and compares television coverage with data from a previously conducted newspaper content analysis. Such a comparison

offers the ability to discover the similarities and differences between newspaper and television news, as they both report on the same topic.

The current research is important because it attempts to isolate a particular section of Christianity instead of simply studying how the media treat all religions blended together. If this method is successful, it may spawn future research using a similar method to garner more focused results instead of simply having data that covers religion as a monolithic entity. Such a focus seems needed to better clarify the media's portrayal of religion, and eventually to investigate how that portrayal may influence religion in America.

On a more practical note, research is warranted to empirically test Christian Fundamentalists' claims of a media bias. If this research suggests a bias indeed exists, such information may be useful to help inform journalists and hopefully ameliorate some of the bias in the future. A finding of no bias may reassure broadcasters that their objectivity standards are being met, despite anyone's claims to the contrary.

Furthermore, studying Fundamentalist Christians and the mass media brings a few other dimensions into the study, such as the relationship between church and state with the rise of Christianity in politics, and the struggle between modernism and tradition as Fundamentalists seem to fight against time itself in their efforts to preserve a more "godly" society. Even the great debate between religion and science must be acknowledged as part of any study of Fundamentalists, as it was their beliefs that spurred the Scopes trial in 1925, and it is their contentions today that continue to raise issues of censorship in schools and the proper way to teach the theories of evolution and creation. This study thus employs both qualitative and quantitative analyses in an effort to clarify and better answer these and related issues.

## **Chapter I: Fundamentalist Christianity: Religious and Political History**

In the early part of the twentieth century a profound religious movement was birthed, not from a new idea, trend, or religious leader, but from the core of Protestant Christianity. The fundamentalist Christians arose as an entrenching of traditional beliefs, attempting to be a bulwark against modernistic reinterpretations of Christianity. However, their strict belief in separation from the world plunged them into the very politics of that world, and their zealous proclamation that more liberal Christians were cultish led them to often being defined as a cult (Elwell, 1997). This section sketches fundamentalist Christianity's interaction with politics and the public over the last century, paying particular attention to the last twenty years and assessing where the relationship stands today. The last twenty years are seen as particularly relevant as it was President Reagan's 1980 landslide election that brought about intense media coverage and academic speculation regarding fundamentalist Christians (Neuhaus, 1986).

The fact that religion impacts politics has seldom been in question, as even the astute French philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville (1994) observed in 1835: "Religion, which never intervenes directly in the government of American society, should therefore be considered as the first of their political institutions, for although it did not give them the taste for liberty, it singularly facilitates their use of it" (p. 292). Still, most Americans also recognize "a wall of separation between Church and state," to the point that they even incorrectly think this phrase from one of Thomas Jefferson's letters is somewhere included in one of America's founding documents (Gaustad, 1999, p. 50; Servin-Gonzalez & Torres-Reyna, 1999). At the center of the controversy over the relationship between church and state is the New Christian Right, which is in fact not new at all, but has its germ in an early twentieth century movement called Christian Fundamentalism.

## Fundamentalism Defined

Fundamentalism is defined in *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* as "a movement in 20<sup>th</sup> century Protestantism emphasizing the literally interpreted Bible as fundamental to Christian life and teaching" (Mish, 1991, p. 498). The word "Fundamentalist" was invented in 1920 to describe militant evangelicals who were willing to take a stand against "liberal theology in the churches or to changes in cultural values or mores, such as those associated with 'secular humanism'" (Marsden, 1994, p. 1). The movement began in America in the early 1900s as an effort to defend traditional Protestant Christianity against the challenges posed by liberal (typically German) theology, higher (textual) criticism, and Darwinism. The birth of Fundamentalism was thus not the creation of a new sect, but merely an entrenching of belief in historic mainline Protestant theology. Christian leaders from around the globe, such as R.A. Torrey from Chicago and James Orr from Glasgow, set about defining what is essential to the Christian faith, eventually publishing in 1917 a twelve-volume set of books entitled *The Fundamentals* (Dollar, 1983; Elwell, 1997).

As listed in *The Fundamentals*, Fundamentalism is defined by four main objectives. First, it affirms traditional Christian beliefs about God, revelation, inspiration, the incarnation, atonement, resurrection, and the Holy Spirit. Specifically, it posits that the Christian God is the only one true God, who has revealed Himself in three persons (trinity), and is the creator of the universe. Revelation "is the act of communicating divine knowledge to the mind" whereas "inspiration is the act of the same Spirit controlling those who make that knowledge known to others" (Gray, 2000, p. 10). According to the Fundamentalists, God inspired His prophets and apostles to write the words of the Bible, such that the original autographs should be seen as God's word though they were written in the writing style of the human authors. The Bible is thus inerrant/infallible and authoritative (Torrey, 1917/2000).

Belief in the incarnation involves affirming that Jesus was born of a virgin (Mary), through the power of God, and thus fulfilling Old Testament prophecy (Orr, 2000). The atonement is the doctrine that Jesus' death somehow made it possible for the

God of justice to have mercy on believers, forgiving their sins. Atonement presumes mankind to be estranged from God, and in need of Jesus' "sin-bearing death; sacrificial death for the guilt and sins of men" (Hague, 2000, p. 94). This is often expressed with the idea of substitution, as Jesus died in mankind's place and is seen as substituting His perfect life for the lives of sinners, specifically for those who put their faith in Christ Jesus.

The bodily resurrection (coming back to life) of Jesus is also a doctrine Fundamentalists affirm, as it is specifically claimed in the New Testament 104 times and is "the most prominent and cardinal point in the apostolic testimony" (Torrey, 1917/2000, p. 298). Fundamentalists claim ample proof exists that this historic event occurred, citing not only circumstantial evidence but also the four independent gospel accounts of the event. They claim that Christianity could not have begun had the resurrection not occurred, and that its certainty is the "Gibraltar of Christian evidence, and the Waterloo of infidelity and rationalism" (Torrey, 1917/2000, p. 299). The final fundamental doctrine involves the personhood and work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is conceived as being the third person of the trinity, whose activity in the world and believer cannot be denied (Torrey, 1917/2000).

Second, Fundamentalism defends the Bible against German Biblical criticism, which argued that the Bible was historically inaccurate (Torrey, 1917/2000). At the original coalescing of Fundamentalism there was much debate about the historical accuracy of the Bible, as Bible scholars such as Ernest Renan and Adolph Harnack sought the "historical" Jesus apart from that which is revealed in the Bible (Douglas, 1992). One prominent British scholar went so far as to claim the Bible was wrong because it spoke of the existence of a "Hittite" kingdom when no archeological remains of such a kingdom existed (Kyle, 2000). Many of the Fundamentalists' positions in this regard have been since substantiated, with the archaeological find of the Hittite civilization and the Dead Sea scrolls (Free, 1962; Kyle, 2000). Fundamentalists also opposed the nascence of Karl Barth's "neo-orthodoxy," where the "truths" of the Bible were claimed to require a leap of faith and in no way depended upon historical accuracy.

Fundamentalists insisted Christianity is not only accurate, but is historically truthful and in many ways verifiable (Torrey, 1917/2000).

Third, *The Fundamentals* denounced movements that Fundamentalists even today do not consider Christian, such as Romanism (Catholic), Mormonism, Darwinism and Socialism (Torrey, 1917/2000). It was felt that the church had to clearly differentiate itself from those who held other doctrines that did not conform to the Fundamentalists literal and prescriptive view of scripture. Darwinism and Socialism were rejected as inherently non-Christian concepts, as other Christian groups at the time were attempting to integrate these philosophies into their doctrinal positions.

Finally, Fundamentalists emphasized evangelism and missions. This means that Fundamentalists not only believe they have the gospel (a transliteration of the Greek word for “good news”) of God, but that they are also required to share the good news with others throughout the world. It should also be noted that *The Fundamentals* was not simply a dry theological commentary, but also included many personal testimonies relating how Christ had worked in people’s lives in the past (Elwell, 1997; Torrey, 1917/2000).

While these four purposes are clearly the underpinnings of Fundamentalism, the real essential cornerstone is the belief in the literal interpretation of the Bible. The understanding of the Bible being authoritative and unerring is at the heart of Christian Fundamentalism. In the words of Bob Jones Jr., “To believe the word, to proclaim the word, and above all, to obey the word. That’s where people fall down these days. They say ‘I believe the Bible is God’s word,’ but they don’t bring themselves under the authority of the Bible” (Marty & Appleby, 1992, p. 61).

Since its conception, fundamentalist Christianity has been prone to intermingle with and attempt to change politics. Seeing themselves as the faithful remnant, the true American patriots, they feel a calling to restore America to her morally correct foundations (Carpenter, 1997). Indeed, Hadden and Shupe (1989) have defined the term fundamentalism as “a proclamation of reclaimed authority over a sacred tradition which is to be reinstated as an antidote for a society that has strayed from its cultural moorings”

(p. 109). It is their contention that fundamentalists refute the modernist split between the sacred and the secular. Bruce Lawrence (1989), author of *Defenders of God: The Fundamentalist Revolt Against the Modern Age*, concurs with this description, explaining that Fundamentalists are specifically against the Enlightenment value structure, wanting instead to have their religious viewpoints acknowledged and legally enforced. Fundamentalism thus involves a plan to bring religion back to center stage in public policy decisions (Hadden & Shupe, 1989).

The entire Christian Right movement can be traced to the Fundamentalists, but not everyone in the Christian Right can properly be called Fundamentalist (Carpenter, 1997). In fact, the Christian Right became more inclusive in the 1990s, actively soliciting various Protestant denominations as well as conservative Catholics and Jews into their coalition. While the core of the Moral Majority in the 1980s were Fundamentalists, the 1990s' Christian Coalition was much more eclectic (Wilcox, 1992). Without delving into too many of the religious particulars, the Christian Right's core constituency is made up of Protestant conservative denominations such as Southern and Regular Baptists, holiness Wesleyans, Pentecostals, Charismatics, and conservative Presbyterian denominations (Carpenter, 1997; Watson, 1997). Most of these groups would call themselves "evangelistic," meaning they believe Christians have a duty to God to share their religious convictions with all who would listen. While all Fundamentalists are indeed evangelical, not all Evangelicals are Fundamentalists. The distinction between these two groups is difficult to ascertain, as one observer of religion in America stated the term Evangelical was simply "the polite word for fundamentalist" (Neuhaus, 1986, p. 11). Other scholars say Fundamentalists are simply the extreme fringe of the Evangelicals (Wellman, 2002). Still, the most salient difference has to do with the Fundamentalist notion of being more strictly separated from "the world," and their correspondingly more anti-modernist and separationist bent (Carpenter, 1997). Fundamentalists have also been found to be considerably more conservative than non-fundamentalist Evangelicals, believe more stringently in the inerrancy of the Bible, and have enlisted more enthusiastically in Christian Right organizations (Wald, 1997).



This study deals specifically with the term “Fundamentalist” as used by the media, which in fact appears to include not only Fundamentalists proper but also those Evangelicals (including Charismatics and Pentecostals) adhering to Fundamentalist values (Maus, 1990). This group has been estimated to be over 20 million Americans, such that every sixth American reports being a conservative Protestant while as many as one in every twelve have reported to be “fundamentalistic” Protestants (Marty & Appleby, 1992). Twenty three percent of Protestant churches in the U.S. label themselves as being “Fundamentalist” (Barna, 1996). White evangelical Protestants have “been overwhelmingly loyal to the Republican Party,” and now represent 24% of registered voters, up from 19% in 1987 (Kohut, Green, Keeter, & Toth, 2000, p. 4). Indeed, often the media’s use of the term “Religious Right” actually refers to “highly mobilized Evangelicals,” and thus it is appropriate to include the entire Christian Right movement in the background analysis (Kohut et al., 2000, p. 118).

In this research, Fundamentalist with a capital “F” will denote the historic Christian protestant group and their doctrinal adherents, whereas fundamentalist with a lower-case “f” will be used as an adjective, typically requiring further clarification as to which religious type (Islamic, Christian, Hindu, etc.). The most accurate word order is to have the descriptor “fundamentalist” precede the noun “Christian.” Also, though it is recognized some redundancy is involved in both cases, this research sees the capital “Fundamentalist” to be appropriate both before and after “Christian.”

### **History of Christian Fundamentalism in America**

While fundamentalist Christianity is truly an American phenomenon, its roots can be seen in doctrines formulated by the British pietistic and Brethren movements (Hoffecker, 1997). Of the many doctrines Fundamentalists endorsed in the early 1900s, the three most important involved premillennialism (the belief that Christ will return to “rapture” the church from an evil world), dispensationalism (that God deals with mankind differently in different time periods, and that this is the final time period), and the absolute inerrancy of the Bible (that every word of the Bible in the original

autographs was inspired by God, and that He has protected His word against human errors in transmission).

These doctrinal positions certainly had political consequences. Premillennialism opposed the formerly widely held millennialist view that mankind would get so good that Jesus would eventually come to reign on earth. The old view supported the notion that politics were a viable means to transform the earth in accordance with the Christian predictions of the future. Fundamentalists believed the earthly political system would lead to the emergence of an “antichrist,” who would directly oppose and even torture Christians. Because of this, politics was seen not as a tool with which to reform the world but instead as a form of power that corrupts and would eventually oppose the faithful. Dispensationalism exacerbated the issue, making Fundamentalists believe the time was short for the “chosen few” to return to God (Wilcox, 1992).

A landmark in the history of Fundamentalism was the publication of *The Fundamentals* (1917/2000), with three million copies being distributed free of charge “to every pastor, evangelist missionary, theological student, Sunday school superintendent, Y.M.C.A. and Y.W.C.A. secretary whose address could be obtained” (Hudson, 1987, p. 338). These publications had the potential to create a theological wildfire, but the dispute was somewhat quelled by the ongoing World War I (Wilcox, 1992).

After the war, the doctrinal debate continued. This debate best highlights an interesting irony, in that while the Fundamentalists decried the impotency of politics to reform the earth, they had to use political coercion to protect their beliefs. The early 1920s saw Democratic presidential nominee William Jennings Bryan champion the Fundamentalist cause by trying to keep evolution from being taught in the public school system. The Fundamentalists’ infamous publicity defeat (though legal victory) in the 1925 case of *Tennessee v. Scopes*, dubbed the “Scopes-Monkey Trial,” severely blighted the reform’s momentum. Indeed, in 1925 “the Fundamentalists were defeated in both the churches and the schools,” having effectively marred the word “evangelical” in the process (Watson, 1997, p. 14; see also Carpenter, 1997).

This defeat did not lead to the sect's disappearance. Indeed, Fundamentalists' controversy with the world and even their failures to reform the world merely confirmed their suspicions about the way things were heading, and so they began to construct a religious subculture. Churches began splitting, with the Baptist and Presbyterian denominations the most affected in terms of numbers of members separating themselves from the original organizations (Carpenter, 1997). Many new schools teaching Fundamentalist beliefs were founded, including Bob Jones College (1926), Dallas Theological Seminary (1926), Western Baptist Seminary (1927), and Los Angeles Baptist Seminary (1927) (Carpenter, 1997). By the early 1930s at least 50 new Bible teaching institutions had been created, many publications had been started, and various radio stations began broadcasting the Fundamentalist message (Carpenter, 1997; Watson, 1997). In fact, "fundamentalist Christians were among the earliest users of broadcasting, beginning in the era before uniform federal regulation began" (Hoover, 1998, p. 158).

The sentiments of the Fundamentalists soon gained adherents, and by the 1940s many mainline Protestant denominations had to make way for the stricter Fundamentalist views within their circles. The Fundamentalists refused to "succumb" to liberal theology, and also rejected Karl Barth's "new orthodoxy," which tried to affirm orthodox Christianity by faith alone instead of defending the historic accuracy of the Bible (Thiselton, 1990). This unrelenting commitment to resist liberally interpreting the Bible, as well as a tendency to retreat from "unspiritual" activities, such as arts and culture, contributed to the perception that the Fundamentalists were intolerant and anti-intellectual (Elwell, 1997; Schaeffer, 1985).

### **The Rise of the "New" Evangelicals**

Perceiving the "total and deliberate distortion of the word fundamentalist," many people within the Fundamentalist groups wished to distance themselves from the Fundamentalist title, and to regain strong ties with the rest of Protestant Christianity (Schaeffer, 1985, p. 348). Beginning in the 1940s, these people began calling themselves "Evangelicals," and while they shared the same beliefs and promoted the same values as the Fundamentalists, they were more tolerant of the inroads made by liberalism in the

mainline Protestant denominations (Reid, 1995a). Often the Fundamentalists are now considered a subset of Evangelical Protestants (Kohut et al., 2000), but it should be noted that many Fundamentalists would resist being too closely associated with what they call the “New Evangelicals” (Beale, 2001).

The Evangelicals may have been the logical outcome of the Fundamentalist subculture. The Fundamentalist schools had educated their flock, enabling them to hold their own in public debate. Many of these may have joined the less rigid Evangelicals, being willing to use the world’s tools of historical criticism and communications technologies to defend their faith. They preached cooperation without compromise, but their limited accommodation led many more strict Fundamentalists to warn of the “slippery slope” of liberalism (Carpenter, 1997; Watson, 1997).

The National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) formed in 1942, bringing a veritable mosaic of evangelical Protestants together to “affect the whole future course of evangelical Christianity in America” (Ockenga, 1942, p. 19). World War II may have jolted the humanistic ideas of earthly utopia, and an explosion of Christian publishing firms ensured that willing masses were exposed to the Evangelical and Fundamentalist agenda. This time a key concern was combating communism, with politicians like Senator Barry Goldwater receiving support. Mainline Protestant churches were in decline, but Fundamentalist and Evangelical missions and ministries thrived (Kelley, 1972; Noll, Bebbington, & Rawlyk, 1994).

Though they both thrived, they did not coexist entirely peacefully. Indeed, many Fundamentalists saw the NAE as a rival, and tensions mounted between the two groups. In June of 1947 Harold Ockenga, former president of the NAE, wrote that Fundamentalism could never win America. Citing that it was “divisive and utterly incapable of cooperative action,” he said Fundamentalists were standing aloof with a negative social ethic “in an hour of crying social problems” (Carpenter, 1997, p. 187).

One institution that did form to tackle the social issues head-on was Youth for Christ. Though Fundamentalists had often been interested in youth activities, the Evangelical’s YFC sparked new fire in both groups’ efforts to create a “Christian

America” in the next generation (Carpenter, 1997). The key to their success was training Christian youths how to live morally and defend their religious convictions, such that they could begin teen-to-teen evangelism. President Truman, after seeing a YFC rally in Olympia, WA, remarked that this was just what the nation needed. Evangelicals thought it was just what the world needed, and proceeded to form an international organization, with evangelist Billy Graham leading crusades across the globe (Carpenter, 1997).

Billy Graham was the first full-time staff member of YFC (YFC, 2001). Though he became an Evangelical, he was in fact raised a Fundamentalist and even attended the Fundamentalist flagship school Bob Jones. After attending for a year, he decided to quit Bob Jones and instead attend the Evangelical Wheaton College in Illinois. Before leaving, the school’s president Dr. Bob Jones told Graham he was “a failure” and “predicted only more failure ahead” (Graham, 1997, p. 41).

Graham, however, was undaunted, and became the leading speaker for Youth for Christ. Though his message has always been religious and not political, he became “America’s preacher” partially by being the religious advisor to nine U.S. presidents (Graham, 1997). He also kept his ties with his roots, continuing to be a member of Fundamentalist organizations.

While Graham used television to evangelize, television was criticized by Fundamentalists who were concerned about its prurient influence upon America’s youth. Fundamentalist publications such as the *Moody Monthly* had many dialogues about the appropriateness of television viewing when television was in its twilight years. Their concern about television’s influence on children was well ahead of the research, and has been echoed in more recent times (Bendroth, 1996).

The 1950s and 1960s continued the same expansion theme, with more division being created between the Evangelicals and Fundamentalists, yet both organizations advancing their religious cause in America. Politically this period was quieter, but Fundamentalists joined supporters of Senator McCarthy’s anticommunist movement, and were part of Goldwater’s bid for president in 1964 (Jorstad, 1970; Watson, 1997). Some trace the political beginnings of the “far right” to the inauguration of John F. Kennedy, as

a reaction against this liberal tide that was sweeping America. Included in such a perceived tide was not only having a Catholic president, but also numerous rulings by the Supreme Court (Jorstad, 1970).

### **The Formation of the Christian Right**

By the 1970s, the Christian Right was beginning to be prominent on the political scene. Wishing to take a stand against “secular humanism,” Fundamentalists fought against evolution, loose personal morality, sexual perversion and communism. Leaders such as Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell and Hal Lindsey attempted to pool Christian resources to influence politics toward a more conservative stance. Newspapers, magazines, television stations, and the Moral Majority were created to promote Christianity in its more Fundamentalist form, and propagate Christian values throughout American society (Elwell, 1997).

Coalescing around the pseudo-conservatism of Goldwater’s 1964 campaign, Evangelicals in particular helped redefine “conservative” in America. Political analyst Kevin Phillips described the “New Right” as thinking “we may live in a time in which conservatism cannot conserve, and so must reach back for lost truths and practices” (Watson, 1997, p. 20). Possibly due to his Baptist affiliation, Jimmy Carter in 1976 garnered more of the evangelical vote than Democrats had in the previous decade. However, evangelicals were quickly alienated as “not only did the Carter administration ignore born-again Christians, it actively and aggressively sought to hurt the Christian movement in America” (Watson, 1997, p. 20).

Having had little political success for two generations, groups like the Moral Majority, Religious Roundtable, and Christian Voice were determined to make an impact in 1980 (Wilcox, 2000). This time they supported the Republican Party, and when Reagan won with an unexpected landslide, journalists reported the Christian Right had played a major part in the victory (Clymer, 1984; Sawyer, 1984). Led by Rev. Jerry Falwell, the Moral Majority claimed four to eight million adherents in the early 1980s, and pollster Louis Harris lent credibility to this number by reporting two-thirds of Reagan’s vote margin was provided by Evangelical and Fundamentalist Christians

(Institute for First Amendment Studies, 2001; Wilcox, 1992, 2000). Furthermore, Falwell's weekly television audience of 25 million made him the second most watched TV personality in the country, with the most watched personality being Johnny Carson (Petty, 1990). The Moral Majority rallied support and finances to assist in electing morally conservative politicians in local, state and national elections. As the political clout of the Christian Right grew, even Ronald Reagan was seen as pandering to its leaders in his 1984 bid for reelection (Herbers, 1984a; Marty & Appleby, 1992). As one enthusiast in 1984 put it: "In 1980 we were a fringe. If we are a fringe now, it is a mighty big fringe" (Herbers, 1984b, p. 1).

Falwell proudly called himself a Fundamentalist with "a big 'F'," but was often criticized by other Fundamentalists because he wanted to build a "big tent" to include Catholics, Jews, Adventists, Mormons and even other faiths (Falwell, 1987, pp. 118-119). The Moral Majority opposed abortion, homosexuality and drugs. It supported traditional family values, Israel, and a strong national defense. While it advocated equal rights for women, it opposed the Equal Rights Amendment. Falwell claimed the Moral Majority was not a political party, did not endorse political candidates, was not trying to force religion by governmental action, and was not trying to get born-again candidates elected (Falwell, 1987).

After an explosive start, Reagan's announcement of a "New Morning" in America may have chilled the Moral Majority's mobilization (Rozell & Wilcox, 1997). Declaring victory stunted the Moral Majority's appeal to battle an active liberal "cosmopolitan elite" agenda that was destroying America. Another major stumbling block to the Moral Majority occurred in 1987, as Jimmy Swaggart first published the sexual scandal of Jim and Tammy Bakker, and then was denounced as having visited a prostitute in his past. These scandals greatly impacted the Moral Majority, as Falwell confessed they were one of his reasons for terminating the association in 1989. His other reason for ending the organization was that he felt it had achieved its purpose, ensuring the Religious Right was a political force with which to be reckoned (Institute for First Amendment Studies, 2001). Others claimed his real reason was that Christianity in politics had failed, citing

the Moral Majority was near bankrupt and had lost much of its constituency (Bruce, 1988; Lienesch, 1993).

Falwell's statement of success was preceded by Marion G. (Pat) Robertson's 1988 campaign for the presidency. Though his bid for election to the United States' highest office was never seriously considered viable, Pat Robertson gave George H. W. Bush a scare in the Iowa primaries and even won the Washington State caucuses, showing his potential as a third party to pull votes away from the major parties ("Big Day," 1988). This solid showing occurred despite Falwell's backing Bush over Robertson (Wilcox, 1992).

Even as Falwell's Moral Majority disbanded, a more eclectic organization called the Christian Coalition formed in 1989. Founded by Robertson and many members trained during his bid for the presidency, this organization reports itself as being a "pro family citizen action" group, with membership of over 1.7 million (The Religious Movements Page, 2001). One of its key activities is sending members "voter information" reports detailing each congressional member's past votes in areas considered (by the Christian Coalition) germane to Christian morality.

While the Moral Majority's core constituency was composed of Fundamentalists, the Christian Coalition is primarily driven by a Charismatic and Pentecostal foundation. These groups hold fundamentalist doctrines and are evangelical, but also include an emphasis on being filled with God's spirit and practicing "spiritual gifts" (i.e., prophecy, speaking in tongues etc.). This gives the Christian Right a certain change in public perception, as the staunch and stern anti-modernists were replaced by a much more energetic and "spirit-filled" group of believers. Still, Fundamentalist values continue to define its constituency and program.

### **The Christian Right 1980-2000**

One key to the success of the Christian Right has been its proliferation of parachurch organizations. In the 1980s and 1990s many organizations formed to spread the "gospel," but others were established to fight for Christian causes in the courts.



In 1990 the Promise Keepers men's organization was established. This group was begun by Bill McCartney, formerly the University of Colorado's football coach, and calls men to moral purity and reconciliation across ethnic and racial divides. By 1993 the organization had grown to over 50,000 men attending a ceremony in a Denver football stadium, and its numbers have since swelled to millions meeting in numerous stadiums across the world. Though not specifically confessing Fundamentalism, its teachings are similar to Fundamentalists and have been criticized by feminists as being too conservative and promoting male elitism (Religious Movements Page, 2001). Though its intentions are strictly moral, it has held million-man marches in Washington DC, and demonstrates how religious activism reinforces the perception of the Christian Right's political muscle.

The 1992 presidential race served to bring many of the Fundamentalist Christian beliefs to the foreground. President Bill Clinton was victorious despite his many stances in opposition to Fundamentalist beliefs, including his insistence that homosexuals be allowed into the military (Bennet et al., 1992). The Christian Right had also been active in the election, as 38% of Bush's votes came from white conservative Christians (Cromartie, 1994). Motivated by its failures, the Christian Right resolved to work harder for the future, broadening its agenda and trying to make inroads into the black community (Reed, 1994).

The 1994 congressional elections proved Christian Right obituaries to be premature, and demonstrated the fundamentalist Christians' sway on the Republican Party. The Republican Party gained 11 freshmen into the U.S. senate, and gained control of the House with 40 of the GOP's freshmen listed as pro-life conservative Christians. The "Christian Right was alive and vibrant in 1994" as it "controlled party machinery in a number of states and represented a sizable faction of Republican primary election voters" (Rozell & Wilcox, 1995, p. 253). The Christian Coalition also backed Newt Gingrich and the Republican Party's "Contract with America," but then was slighted as the GOP's version focused on fiscal instead of social reform (Religious Movements Page, 2001; Rozell & Wilcox, 1995).

Some division also began internally in 1994, as the “Toronto Blessing” at Toronto Airport Vineyard church created a large stir within Christian circles. This “blessing” was claimed to be a fresh infusing of the Holy Spirit, causing Fundamentalists to choose sides as Pentecostal (Fundamentalist) denominations mostly accepted this new “gifting.” The “blessing” was manifested by people having spiritual visions, speaking in tongues (a religious foreign language typically not understood by the speaker) and people falling to the floor “slain in the spirit” by the power of God (Hanegraaff, 1997). This “blessing” highlighted the main differences between Pentecostals and other Fundamentalists, as strict Fundamentalists reject tongues and Pentecostals criticize the Fundamentalist emphasis on church order (Gerbner et al., 1984). The issue continued to dominate religious news media in 1995 as the Toronto blessing spread to become the Brownsville Revival in Pensacola, FL (Religious Movements Page, 2001). Furthermore, the American Civil Liberties Union successfully sued the Christian Coalition, claiming they were advocating a specific political party and should thus lose their tax-exempt status.

The 1996 reelection of President Clinton showed the Fundamentalists in no way controlled the American political system, but the subsequent morality questions and congressional impeachment show the Fundamentalists did have adherents in Congress (Thomas, 1996). Republican nominee Senator Robert Dole was also not vocal in his support for the Christian Right’s agenda, and in a sense he gave the platform to the conservatives but the convention to the moderates (Rozell & Wilcox, 1997). The Christian Right claimed a much more vigorous activist movement could have been mobilized had Dole “more directly and passionately championed a pro-life stand, or school choice, or traditional moral values” (Rozell & Wilcox, 1997, p. 259). While moderates could claim the intolerant platform was to blame, “Christian conservatives can correctly argue that Dole ignored their issues and their constituency, and lost the election” (Rozell & Wilcox, 1997, p. 259).

In 1997 the fundamentalist Southern Baptist Convention flexed another kind of power, as it joined the Pentecostal fundamentalist Assemblies of God church in boycotting all things Disney (Ferguson, 1997). Disney was denounced as no longer

representing family values, and its blatantly pro-homosexuality stance was seen as offensive (Ferguson, 1997). While such a joint endeavor between Pentecostal and Fundamentalist denominations may have helped heal some of the internal strife, the rest of America may have questioned the choice of targets for moral outrage and boycotting.

Although some individuals benefited from Christian Coalition support, overall 1998 was a defeat for the Christian Right. This possibly occurred due to the Christian Right's preoccupation and zealous support of impeaching President Clinton, while two thirds of the public did not desire impeachment (Green, Rozell, & Wilcox, 2000). Policy continued to resist change, as Christians failed to get strong legislation passed to combat religious persecution in other countries (Chen, 1998). Many other issues such as abortion, evolution in education, and euthanasia continued to be debated in the media. Just as in the Reagan years, there was much rhetoric but little action with respect to the Christian Right's cause (Green et al., 2000; Reed, 1996a). Republican strategists overtly discussed the need to keep social conservatives happy without passing any of their policies, valuing tobacco farmers over Christian conservatives, and being more concerned with cutting taxes than halting abortion.

In 1999 the Christian Right was in some disarray, and key leaders left their positions and many preachers questioned the utility of political action. This naturally led to some religious activists returning to their more separationistic tendencies, while others simply decided to concentrate more on their grassroots political endeavors (Green et al., 2000).

In 2000 fundamentalist Christian beliefs were thrust to the foreground, as then presidential hopeful George W. Bush's visit to the Bob Jones Seminary, a bastion of Fundamentalist beliefs, was questioned by his liberal opponents. Attempting to thwart liberals using his visit to type-cast him as anti-Catholic, Bush expressed his disagreement with some of the school's tenets but was careful not to distance himself from his fundamentalist Christian supporters (Berke, 2000). Indeed, Pat Robertson gave him the seal of approval early in the primaries for his firm stance on limiting abortion (Wilcox, 2000). Religion ultimately was a factor in Election 2000, as 70% of America's

churchgoers voted for Bush, whereas previous elections saw this demographic about evenly split (Wellman, 2002).

In 2001 the emphasis was less on national politics and more on local politics. The Christian Coalition website heralds itself as “America's Leading Grassroots Political Organization Fighting for America's Families” (Christian Coalition, 2001). In fact, since 1998 the Christian Coalition has been increasingly turning its attention toward grassroots political development (Green et al., 2000). The idea is that the local level (city councils, school boards, etc.) is where the working policy is formed, and thus also where the most immediate “good” can be accomplished. Furthermore, the Christian Coalition is dedicated to training politicians, and the best place to start them is at the local level (Reed, 1996a). This emphasis on the lower levels of political involvement may reap future benefits, as the group may be able to have experienced candidates of its own, and not have to rely on supporting Republican candidates who may not feel as strongly about its issues.

### **Party Affiliation and Influence**

The Christian Right has supported both Democratic and Republican candidates. Before the 1850s, evangelical Christians in America were almost exclusively Democrats (Reed, 1996a). As the Civil War approached, religion played a large role in mobilizing the masses against slavery, and so the Republican Party's stress on abolition won over many adherents. These precursors to Fundamentalists then went back to the Democratic Party to support the workers for social benefits after World War I, and worked in both parties toward prohibition (Reed, 1996a). To the Christian Right's socially conservative message has often been added some of the party issues with which it was affiliated. However, Evangelicals have slowly been distancing themselves from the Democratic Party since the 1960s, and the Carter administration succeeded in alienating many from the Democratic constituency. Since the 1980s the New Christian Right has become firmly rooted in the Republican Party, but has achieved relatively little positive policy change for its support (Wilcox, 2000).

The Republican Party has become the Christian Right's home due to a few issues that link the two groups. Specifically, within the Republican Party is a great fear of a burgeoning "big brother" socialist government, which resonates well with the Fundamentalist's apprehension of politics and government in general. The GOP's strong emphasis on individualism is also in tune with the Protestant religious view that stresses freedom from religious authority structures, and the support of business against inefficient workers fits well with the Protestant work ethic. While a union of "authoritarian traditionalists" with "radical individualists" cannot always be stable, they find a powerful reason for uniting against the common enemies of federal regulation and excessive taxation (Eisenstadt, 1999, p. 172). In a comparison of Pat Robertson's 1988 presidential bid supporters with other Republican supporters, few ideological differences were found, suggesting "the Christian Right will be eventually assimilated into the Republican party" (Green & Guth, 1988, p. 150).

The Christian Right has yet to be assimilated, presently constituting a faction of the GOP in most states, sometimes with hostility and sometimes being well integrated into the party's structure (Wilcox, 2000). As a party faction the Christian Right contends with moderates for control of nominations, which in turn leads to campaign resources and party platforms. "The Christian Right provides the Republicans with a pool of potential voters and volunteers and a ready communication network and infrastructure. But these resources come at a price, for in most elections in which Christian Right activists have won their party's nomination, they have lost the general election" (Wilcox, 2000, p. 8). This lack of politicians specifically chosen by the Christian Right to obtain office may be one of the most important reasons the Christian Right has had so little policy success.

Differences in state election rules also seem to be an important player in deciding the success of the Christian Right within the party. The use of a state election system in Virginia helped the Christian Right nominate Oliver North in 1994, but in 1996 a primary election allowed a more moderate John Warner to overcome strong opposition (Rozell & Wilcox, 1996). In Washington the "jungle" primary allowed Ellen Craswell to win the nomination (Rozell & Wilcox, 1997, p. 11). From these examples it seems that often the

rules that benefit the Christian Right candidates do not always benefit the Republican Party.

The Republican Party may gain a revitalization by allowing the Christian Right into its ranks, but such an outcome is predicated upon the Christian Right taking a more tolerant stance. The legendary “intensity of Christian Right activists” is a valuable commodity, but these individuals may be more difficult to inspire with a mild or compromised stance on their issues (Wilcox, 1997, p. 7). The difficulty is the classic tradeoff between espousing more extreme and absolutist positions, which can get a core of activists very enthused, and taking a more accommodating stance to thwart estrangement of the population (Kivisto, 1995).

The Christian Right seems to be learning, as indicated by its use of rights language and campaigns at the grassroots level (local school board elections, etc.), how to broaden its appeal without jeopardizing its ability to mobilize the activist core (Moen, 1995). Former Christian Coalition executive director Ralph Reed (1994) wrote:

“Either we can become inflamed with zeal, and make much sound and fury before our fervor and influence ultimately dissipate; or we can assume the role of a responsible player within the democratic polity, so that the voices of Christians will always be heard in public discourse.” (p. 134)

This strong institutionalized moral force redefining the central cultural values of the Republican Party may be somewhat to blame for the increasing polarization of the parties. That the parties are polarized is fairly well documented, as “today the two parties are more homogenous internally and farther apart from each other than was the case for much of the twentieth century” (Bond & Fleisher, 2000, p. 189). This polarization is likely to increase in the future, as many of the nation’s secular elements have been drawn to the Democratic Party, counter-mobilizing the Christian Right’s agenda (Kivisto, 1995). Mainline Protestants seem to also be deserting the Republican Party, as an analysis of the 1992 election saw large numbers desert Bush and instead vote for Clinton or Perot (Kellstedt, Green, Guth, & Smidt, 1995).

By 1999 the Christian Right “had achieved greater institutional influence within a political party than any other movement, with virtual control over the presidential party platform and veto power over vice presidential nominees” (Green et al., 2000, p. 291). This was accomplished at least in part due to the Christian Right’s ability to mobilize some of the “silent majority,” who historically had a smaller predisposition to vote, but nonetheless held distinctively conservative positions (Wilcox, 2000).

### **The Christian Right’s Agenda**

Because the Christian Right is very divided internally, many issues are key to its unification. “The Christian Right has no single agenda, but rather a collection of overlapping agendas” (Wilcox, 2000, p. 7). This is also a danger, as often the very issues that tie the group together separate other portions of the Christian Right. While Protestant values tie Fundamentalists and Evangelicals, doctrinal differences separate them from the Pentecostals and Charismatics. The very values that do overlap often offend the Catholics, whereas the anti-abortion effort helps bring Catholics into the fold. Their highly charged topics of abortion, education, and homosexual rights also ensure they are opposed by powerful, well-organized groups such as the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League, League of Women Voters, People for the American Way, the National Organization for Women, the American Civil Liberties Union, and the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (Wilcox, 2000).

The Christian Right’s stances, though obviously not held by all, advocate limiting or prohibiting pornography, abortion, evolution in schools, homosexuality’s acceptance as a norm, communism and the liberal agenda in general. This group supports a strong national defense, controls limiting welfare to the truly needy, placing prayer back in schools, and promoting religion in public life in general (Watson, 1997; Wilcox, 2000).

To accomplish this diverse agenda, “the Christian Coalition often behaves like other interest groups, lobbying Democrats as well as Republicans and sometimes entering into unusual coalitions” (Wilcox, 2000, p. 7). The Christian Coalition even teamed with one of its most bitter political enemies, the ACLU, to defeat lobby registration and campaign finance reform. Still, while its general ideas seem to resonate with the

American people, its more strict policy implementation ideas preclude it from gaining a majority following. “Far more people agree with vague notions about the need to strengthen families and to promote social responsibility, than with the NCR positions on issues such as abortion, and prayer in public schools” (Kivisto, 1995, p. 3).

Political agenda setting<sup>1</sup> as hypothesized by Baumgartner and Jones (1993) may help explain the Christian Right’s lack of policy attainment, as they suggested policy making is “punctuated by bursts of activity that modify issue understandings and lead to non-incremental policy change” (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993, p. 54). Their rationale is based upon the assumption that once policy is enacted, it creates its own inertia by being institutionalized, as public interest quickly fades. These policies that go unnoticed for some time are then ripe for destruction when the public’s attention is once again focused on them.

This is particularly germane to the Christian Right’s position, as it politically organized well after many secular laws had been enacted, such as the *Abington v. Schempp* decision in 1963 (limiting Bible reading in schools), and *Roe v. Wade* (making abortion legal in every state) in 1973. Secularization had already been institutionalized, making the reversal of such legislation an uphill battle. That fundamentalist Christians are fighting hard can be seen as their agenda has gained national prominence and recognition, if not acceptance. The Christian Right has worked in nearly every level of politics, but still can hardly boast of making even small incremental progress. Baumgartner and Jones’ (1993) theory of “punctuated equilibrium” in the agenda setting process suggests that either the Christian Right will fade away with their policies never being enacted (especially since they have been able to attain public interest without gaining a popular cry for change) or that the Christian Right must await the proper set of circumstances and wisely manipulate those circumstances to effect quick and sweeping institutional change.

Though Fundamentalists’ efforts have often been criticized for bringing undue influence of religion into politics, they have also brought important moral issues to the



public debate (Wilcox, 2000). From their standpoint, it is not theocracy that should be feared, but its opposite—a purely secular state. Fundamentalists contend that instead of having a government controlled by God and religious principles, today America is experiencing a God and religious principles that have to bow down to governmental regulations and controls (Schaeffer, 1985). From no prayer allowed in schools, to legalized “no fault” divorce and legalized abortion (which is murder in their terms), the government has begun to ensure only the lukewarm religions will survive (Reed, 1996b). Believers are compelled to check their righteous indignation at “evil” occurring in society, or else risk the wrath of the “tolerance police”. To them, the U.S. has become a breeding ground for lukewarm religion, and other American Christians have been lulled into the tepid waters by television’s soft but sweet immoral lullabies. Fundamentalists would argue that while religiosity remains stable and at high levels in the United States, the beliefs defining religion are under attack. Society may not be quickly becoming atheistic, but it is becoming secular because the God people profess to believe in today is tainted with secularism (Patterson, 1983). He is not the God of tradition and the God revealed in the Bible. Hence Fundamentalists charge that a government not able to tolerate intense traditional Christianity is a government that outlaws the true Christian faith (Schaefer, 1985). They have entered the realm of lawmaking (politics) in order to preserve America’s moral fabric for future generations (Reed, 1996b).

### **Conclusions**

From this historical and political review, it is clear that the Christian Right has enjoyed only cyclical prominence in American politics. “The Christian Right is more like a meteor or a fixed star than a comet that appears and retreats along a more or less regular path, attracting our attention periodically and then seeming to disappear, retreating but always returning” (Lienesch, 1993, p. 248). It was strong in the 1920s, 1940s, early 1980s and 1990s, but often was claimed to have been entirely extinguished during the intervals of its activism. It was strong when it focused on clearly defined

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<sup>1</sup> Political agenda setting means getting a policy in front of the leaders who can enact such a policy, which often involves bringing public attention to an issue.

issues and sought specific goals. Despite commanding 15-30 percent of the American people as adherents, it has for the most part failed to achieve the bulk of its political agenda (Gallup, 2001b; Jelen, 1991; Wilcox, 2000). As viewed by Fundamentalists, abortions, homosexuality, more radical women's rights efforts, religious pluralism, and evolution in education continue unabated. The Christian Right originally allied itself with the Democratic Party, and now has strong affiliations with the Republican Party, but still has little tangible benefit. Though recognized as a political player, it has been given a supporting role rather than acting as a driving force in the political drama.

Many fundamentalist Christians are once again sounding the horn for withdrawal, pronouncing again the futility of politics and advocating a purely altruistic and religious participation in America. "The purists want to apply the principles of a kingdom that knows no compromise to a kingdom that is all about compromise...In politics, zealotry is often seen as fanaticism. Politics is about compromise, and goals are mostly achieved in increments. Politics and faith are irreconcilable" (Thomas & Dobson, 1999, p. 49, 118). Political activism is also disparaged by Bob Jones III, former president of Fundamentalist Bob Jones University, who says the church is not about elections but about preaching salvation (Marty & Appleby, 1992).

Some Republicans have long feared an *unholy* union between religion and politics, and have suggested it could lead to fracturing and even the demise of the Republican Party. Blumenthal (1987) of *The Washington Post* has looked at such a possibility and believes the Christian Right has staying power, stating:

The GOP may crack, but the New Right Evangelicals will flourish. That would be the ultimate fulfillment of 'social issue' conservatism. The divisions these sorts of politics engender are inescapable. And the party that enacts sectarian doctrine into law in the attempt to regenerate a lost world will pay a steep political price. (p. 270)

Despite any sort of break-up of the Republican Party, Pat Robertson has promised his organization "would continue to be a permanent fixture on the American political scene" (Green et al., 2000, p. 295). Unlike past Christian groups, the Christian Coalition

has as one of its main tenets the raising and training of politically active Christians. It has also begun to concentrate not just on national politics, but on winning grassroots campaigns for school boards and city political positions (Watson, 1997).

Though some confusion is prevalent, the Christian Right's overall agenda seems clear. Members feel government is ordained by God, and that the U.S. Constitution specifies all human rights are derived from God. They have seen the advancing of the liberal agenda in America, and have now sought to once again have a voice in government. They want to defend their traditional morals and ways of life, but they do not merely seek to "keep the faith" themselves, but also to change America so that the faith can be kept more easily. Their movement is thus defensive, but also offensive in nature, using both the establishment and the free expression Constitutional clauses.

While many may oppose the more radical elements in the Christian Right, some would concede that it has also brought at least some benefits to the nation (Wilcox, 2000). "The mobilization of previously apolitical evangelicals and fundamentalists into politics constitutes a useful broadening of the electorate and of the active public" (Wilcox, 2000, p. 156). The pluralism of America works best when all-important voting blocs are represented in policy negotiations, and the incorporation of the Christian Right into the public sphere has brought--with great debate--basic moral and religious values back into consideration when crafting public policies.

The Christian Right's earlier forays into politics effected little advance, and has culminated in little enactment of policy. From Reagan to the Republican "Contract with America," much was promised but little delivered (Wilcox, 2000). This is in part due to the fact that non-Christian Right Republicans are better candidates in elections. The Christian Right seems to once again be entering a quieter period, but this time the movement is seeking more grassroots political organization, and it has better learned the language of politics. It may be withdrawing from national prominence, but still exerting much pressure at the local and state levels (Lienesch, 1993; Wilcox, 2000).

The future of fundamentalist Christians participating in the Republican Party is unclear. While they are dissatisfied by their current alliance, they certainly will not

become Democrats in the near future. The declining affiliation of Americans with a particular political party, and subsequent rise of people declaring themselves Independents, may be due in part to this alienation (Bond & Fleisher, 2000). Though strong contending third parties have been trying to make breakthroughs since 1992, there is still no other party for members of the Christian Right to join. Thus they are caught with an unaccommodating taskmaster, some very vocal opposition, and a bit of a retreat from the national scene.

Perhaps the most damaging issue to the Christian Right's cause is their religious particularism, with Fundamentalists leading the way in the division. Studies show that self-identified Fundamentalists who made up the Moral Majority's core are sometimes reluctant to support the Pentecostals' and Charismatics' view of a "Christian Coalition" (Wilcox, 1992). These two groups continue to label one another, as the Fundamentalists are called "the chosen frozen" while the Charismatics are dubbed "holy rollers" and "chandelier swingers" (Wilcox, 1992).

The present research is concerned with understanding how Fundamentalists have been portrayed by the media, which is presumably related to how the Christian Right is perceived. In a contemporary functioning democracy, any group attempting to change public policy must first win adherents from the mass public, and just about every appeal to voters is first filtered through the media.

## **Chapter II: The Media**

Whereas in the distant past politics could be accomplished by what was essentially an American aristocracy that communicated with its constituency in pubs or by letters transported via horseback, today's mass society requires the mass media for propagation of ideas (Carey, 1995). This fundamentally changes the way information is circulated in society, as the media become mediators of information. It is thus important to look at how Fundamentalists view and use the media, and how the media have viewed and portrayed religion in general and Fundamentalists in particular.

### **Fundamentalists' View and Use of the Media**

The best way to describe the relationship between Fundamentalists and the media is a love-hate relationship. Fundamentalists pin both their highest hopes and their worst fear on the mass media, as the media represent a tool for fulfilling their mandate to preach the news about Jesus to the world while at the same time being an antagonistic propaganda tool proclaiming the reality of a secular and potentially hostile world. Edward Carnell, a Fundamentalist seminary professor at Fuller, said "TV, while it may threaten to convert every home into a theater, can also turn every parlor into a church. By overtaking man in his solitude TV enjoys an access into hearts which the organized church does not" (Carnell, 1950, p. 89). This polarized view of the media is reflected in how Fundamentalists are lambasted in the media for being anti-modernistic while at the same time they have generated substantial mass communications resources of their own. Fundamentalists "have borrowed the technology of modernization with all its bewilderments and used it substantially to promote nostalgic and simplistic vision of the past as models for the future" (Marty, 1987, p. 317).

The beginnings of this media empire have already been discussed to some extent. It should be further noted that one of today's most influential Christian media moguls is Pat Robertson, whose program *The 700 Club* has been dubbed "the media arm of the Religious Right" (Abelman, 1994, p. 887). The topics discussed on the program are about one third religious, one third social, and one third political (Abelman, 1990). While stemming from meager beginnings at a small local television station in

Portsmouth, VA, in 1961, the Christian Broadcasting Network eventually went international with *The 700 Club* receiving over \$100 million a year in donations (Stream, 1996).

Robertson represents the Charismatic or Pentecostal side of Fundamentalism (he prefers to be called a “spirit-filled evangelical”), which typically is most willing to use the media instead of opting for insulating themselves from popular culture (Stream, 1996, p. 3). “Evangelicals seek to redeem the media through criticism, protests, and boycotts designed to eliminate content that might undermine people’s faith in God and seduce them into immoral behavior. Fundamentalists sometimes join in those efforts, but they have less faith that media can be used for good” (Stout & Buddenbaum, 1996, p. 37).

A clear example of Fundamentalist skepticism can be seen as Tim LeHaye, co-author of the popular *Left Behind* novels, stated:

It’s no secret to any of us how the liberal media manages the news and helps to set the national agenda on public debate. They report the news in such a way as to promote the political goals of the left. The censorship of Christian principles and ideas covers many more issues than abortion and the homosexual lifestyle. The media slants what is reported in the areas of national defense, the budget, school prayer, and soviet expansion in Central America, among others. The truth in all these areas is being hidden. (in Hunter, 1991, p. 227)

While Fundamentalists may recognize secular television is a mainstream phenomenon, they mostly see TV as a tool secular humanists are using to install values of permissiveness and rebellion toward authority (Gross, 1990). At the same time, their religiosity defines how they use the mass media.

Mass communications researchers only have a limited knowledge of how religiosity defines mass media audiences (Stout & Buddenbaum, 1996, p. 6). One study finds those who attend any kind of worship service are less likely to be heavy viewers of television (defined by watching more than six hours a day) (Jackson-Beeck & Sobal, 1980). Furthermore, television has been shown to play a lesser role in the lives of conservative Protestants than in the lives of the general public (Hamilton & Rubin, 1992).

When conservative Christians do watch television, their viewing patterns have been found to be more reactionary, avoiding certain content (specifically sexually explicit content and violence) and looking for programming that offers positive moral guidance (Hamilton & Rubin, 1992). Conservative Christians who watch religious television do not differ demographically from the general population, but instead of using television for entertainment and relaxation, they watch religious programming for religious devotion and educational purposes (Buddenbaum, 1981).

Newspaper readership has also been linked to religion. In general, Jews are most likely to read newspapers, and those unaffiliated with Judeo-Christianity are the least likely to read newspapers (Rigney & Hoffman, 1993). Fundamentalists are significantly less likely to read newspapers than either Catholics or liberal Protestants (Rigney & Hoffman, 1993; see also Hoover, 1998). Those who consider themselves “born again”, as Fundamentalists and Evangelicals do, are less likely to read secular newspapers but much more likely to read religious newspapers (Hoover, 1998).

Some studies indicate that literacy and religiosity are positively correlated (Land, Dean, & Blau, 1991), which makes sense since historically reading and general education were propagated by Christians for the cause of ensuring everyone could read the Bible (Barton, 1992). In America, as in other countries, religious commitment (defined in terms of church attendance, belief in God, etc.) has been found to decline when the publication of religious books relative to secular books decreases (Wuthnow, 1976).

In general, research indicates “religion does have some effect on the mass media people use, the way they use media, and the content they prefer” (Buddenbaum, 1996). Religious people, and especially conservative Christians, are attracted to content that supports their beliefs, and while Fundamentalists read less than others in the Christian and Jewish fold, they still read more than a person with no religious affiliation (Buddenbaum, 1996).

### **Journalists' Historic Religious Stance in America**

The battle between mass media and religion has waged since before the founding of the nation, with James Franklin's *New England Courant* criticizing government and religious establishments as early as 1721. In that case, a committee of the Massachusetts legislature "concluded that the paper had both mocked religion and affronted the government," eventually leading to the paper's owner (and teenaged brother Benjamin Franklin) being run out of town (Silk, 1995, p. 16).

At the same time, the birth of journalism in America had a lot in common with the principles of evangelism. Just as the Reformation owed much of its success to Gutenberg's printing press, so do evangelicals owe much of their influence in America to their early influence in the mass media.

From the founding of the Plymouth colonies to the present, the United States has been an incredible laboratory in which evangelicals have been able to experiment with every imaginable form and medium of communication, from Bible and tract printing to tent revivals, gospel billboards, books, religious drama troupes, radio and television broadcasts, parade floats, motorcycle evangelism, periodicals, and even Rollen Stewart, the rainbow-wigged sniper who holds up scripture signs in front of the TV network cameras during sports events. (Schultze, 1990b)

This evangelical experimentation also in turn had an impact upon American journalism, with great common ground being shared in their disinterest in tradition, faith in technology, drive toward popularization and strong belief in individualism (Schultze, 1990b).

Some have even argued that the very concept of news sprang from a Christian, in particular a Calvinist, world view (Olasky, 1990). This notion is rooted in the historical understanding that Christianity brought with it a more linear conceptualization of time, explaining a creation and predicting a termination of the Earth. News is therefore important immediate history on a time line, and is part of God's gospel (meaning "good news"), as His sovereignty directs mankind toward a climax. Thus nothing in time is aimless, circular or wholly destructive, as it all plays a part in the divine drama that is



constantly unfolding. Many important newspapers of the past related all news in this fashion, and hints of this style can be seen today in such phrases as calling natural disasters “acts of God.” This style of reporting began to flourish in the late eighteenth century, and while some were obviously theological periodicals “others, like the *Boston Recorder*, included reports that were democratic in coverage, democratic in style, but theocentric in belief” (Olasky, 1990, p. 61).

The 1800s saw a rising tide of religious news, as tract and Bible societies sought to inundate the U.S. with Protestant beliefs and values. Indeed, many papers arose with affiliations to denominations, so that Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians and Unitarians competed for a hearing. “Evangelicals founded most of the early book publishing organizations in the early years of the colonies, resulting in an enormous publishing industry” (Schultze, 1996, p. 61).

Secular book dealers also caught on, and eventually the new media form of mass-circulation daily newspapers included religious news. One such paper, the *New York Herald*, “changed the face of American journalism with splashy news of crime, and sex, political muckraking, exposes of financial wheeler-dealing—and coverage of religion” (Silk, 1995, p. 17). In this paper religion was treated as news, but when secular journalists began covering religious meetings as moral dramas “clergymen as well as the religious press roundly denounced the secular intrusion into their spiritual domain” (Silk, 1995, p. 17).

Eventually newspapers published full church pages and columns of religious features and announcements. As growing metropolitan areas led to competition for print space with other churches and secular activities, many churches decided to pay for advertisements instead of being relegated to the small print margins. Newspapers then feared losing advertisers, and thus became reluctant to print religious news that would be offensive or controversial in any way, leading to bland and staid coverage of religion. When large religious scandals or events did occur, they were typically reported in another section of the paper so that the advertising churches were somewhat isolated from the “real news” (Silk, 1995, p. 25).

Many attacks upon Christianity stemmed from the late nineteenth century, and journalists were there to cover all the controversy. From Charles Darwin's postulation that man may have evolved from "lower" animals, to the advent of numerous pseudo-Christian groups such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons (called "cults" by the mainline and Fundamentalist traditions), Christians began to feel the squeeze of an increasingly pluralistic society (Marty, 1986). Perhaps the mere coverage of such controversial news was enough to start religious leaders to decry the media's "secularization" of the American public. Evidence, though only a correlation, indicates that just as church attendance declined from 1890 to 1923, so did newspaper religious content decline from 5.6 percent to 2.3 percent (Lynd & Lynd, 1929).

From the very outset, many journalists opposed the Fundamentalists for their rigid doctrinal stances and proclamation that they alone knew the truth of God. One editorial in *Time* referred to Dr. Harry Fosdick, an eminent early defender of liberal Christianity, when it stated:

If he is ousted, it will show that the fourth largest Protestant denomination in the United States, caught between the two horns of a dilemma, has chosen to impale itself upon scriptural infallibility rather than leave the interpretation of the Bible to individual conscience, which is too prone to be affected by modern science. ("Who is Fundamental?" as cited in Buddenbaum & Mason, 2000)

Journalism, on the other hand, was in some ways in its most glorious days in the early 1900s, as journalists stood up for the individuals in society and fought against the abuses of power in business and government. With their strong social reform message and pro-individualistic stance, perhaps it was inevitable that they should start questioning traditionalized religion. Whereas the 1920s saw a number of leading newspapers hire committed reporters to cover religion, they were often barred from conferences by mistrustful church leaders (Silk, 1995, p. 27).

This fear of journalists surely was fueled in part by the coverage of the Scopes trial, in which Fundamentalists were often labeled unscientific and unintellectual. In fact, the caricatures of Fundamentalists led journalist and political philosopher Walter

Lippmann to accuse the press of creating stereotypes and being too reliant upon slick categories of analysis (1922). Despite his own warning, Lippmann wrote in 1929 that Fundamentalism “no longer appeals to the best brains and the good sense of a modern community, and that the movement is recruited largely from the isolated, the inexperienced, and the uneducated” (1929/1964). That coverage of the Scopes trial may have had a detrimental impact is also indicated by the plummeting approval of traditional Christian beliefs and practices, declining from 78% in 1905 to 33% in 1930 (Hart, 1933).

It would seem the maxim “there are no atheists in foxholes” should include the corollary that after the foxhole soldiers would want to know what they had gotten themselves into. Post World War II America experienced a resurgence of religious devotion, and as noted earlier, Evangelicals and Fundamentalists aggressively used mass communication to propagate their religious views. Religion made “big news” in the secular media too, with prominent stories such as the ecumenical movement of the National Council of Churches and the Billy Graham crusades. The top religious story was the Vatican II deliberations, as the Catholic Church updated its dogmas and discontinued mandating the Latin mass. In a study of American newspaper coverage of religion from 1849 to 1960, Nordin (1975, as cited in Silk, 1995) concludes newspapers contributed to the maintenance of an American religious consensus (Silk, 1995).

As may be intuitive, the 1960s and 1970s also proved difficult for the Christian religion to maintain its place of prominence in both society and in the news. Despite the resurgence after World War II, the grand picture saw religious coverage in the media declining since its heyday in the mid to late 1800s. In a study of religious content in the *New York Times* from 1865 to 1975, Pettit (1986, as cited in Silk, 1995) notes a steady decline in space allocated to religion, with a sharp drop off at the turn of the century. From 1945 to 1955 religious space doubled, but by 1975 the *New York Times* had reached its all-time low of covering religion (Pettit, 1986, as cited in Silk, 1995). The flavor of religious news had also changed, and instead of covering the more mundane occurrences in large religious institutions, religion began to be seen more as a counter-cultural movement. Eastern religious cults were noted as a threat to middle-class American

youth, and there was “the so-called born again movement, symbolized by Jimmy Carter, which appeared cult like to those unfamiliar with the language and practices of evangelical Protestantism” (Silk, 1995, p. 36). This movement evolved into the Christian Right, which by the early 1980s was “receiving so much ink and air time that some wondered whether Jerry Falwell and company weren’t simply a creation of the secular news media” (Silk, 1995, p. 36).

Some signs indicate the religious decline noted in the mid 1970s has been checked, as a study of the *New York Times*, *Minneapolis Star* and the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* showed religious stories had become “longer, broader in scope and more issue-oriented than they once were” (Buddenbaum, 1986, p. 605). That a media elite was trying to force its values upon society was also postulated, as some saw a discontinuity between the U.S. public’s view of religion and the press’s apathy and antipathy toward covering it (Muggeridge, 1977). Regardless of how journalists covered religion, Greeley (1972a) stated that statistical data “simply do not indicate a declining religiousness in the United States” (p. 7).

In order to get closer to the crux of the secularization hypothesis, Lichter and Rothman (1981) interviewed 240 journalists and broadcasters from the “media elite.” They found that a predominant characteristic was a “secular outlook,” with only half professing religious affiliation, and only one in five professing to be Protestant. A full 86% seldom or never attended religious services.

After further analysis and study of the “media elite,” Lichter, Rothman and Lichter (1986) conclude, “the typical leading journalist is the very model of the modern eastern urbanite” (p. 294). Interviews revealed most journalists placed themselves left of center, typically voting Democratic, and differing from the general public’s opinion on divisive issues such as abortion, gay rights, and affirmative action. This bias was reflected in how journalists perceived the news, and played a key role in deciding who they chose to interview when making the news themselves (Lichter et al., 1986).

Whereas Lichter and Rothman (1981) simply stated it had yet to be determined if this “secular outlook” influenced news reporting, Fundamentalist Jerry Falwell (1983) stated:

Far from reflecting what the public thinks, the press reflects what it thinks—what it believes is the right course for America to follow. No wonder those who are trying to call America back to her moral and spiritual traditions and heritage are so often ravaged by columnists and excoriated by network reporters. (p. 2)

### **Journalists’ Present Persuasion toward Religion**

Over 30 years ago Louis Cassels, religion editor of United Press International, identified many areas of religious news coverage that he said needed more and better attention in the press. These areas included coverage of institutional activities (i.e., pastoral changes and revivals), controversies such as doctrinal disputes and church involvement in political issues, and humanity’s never-ending quest for a confident faith to live by. Cassels explained that people want to know if God exists, if the Resurrection actually took place, and if there is life after death. He said newspapers should cover religious issues as fairly, dispassionately and fearlessly as they do other controversies (Hynds, 1980).

According to Hynds’ (1999) study polling religious newspaper section editors, more coverage was given religion in the 1990s than had been in the 1970s and 1980s. However, 94% of newspaper editors polled reported the amount of space assigned to religion is less than that assigned to sports, lifestyle sections, business, and the arts (Hynds, 1999). Other interesting data included finding that about 50% of the religious section editors did not belong to an organized religion (or chose not to divulge their affiliation). Of the editors having a religious affiliation, 35% were Catholics, 29% United Methodists, 16% Episcopalians, 10% Lutherans, 7% Presbyterians, and 3% Southern Baptists (and thus the most likely to have been Fundamentalists).

A 1993 Freedom Forum study designed to detect alienation between the news media and institutions covered by the media found “a chasm of misunderstanding and ignorance separates those who pursue careers in the secular news-media field and those

whose careers are in the field of religion” (Hynds, 1999, p. 43). This separation was found operant at both the journalist and editorial level, and recommendations were made to educate the media as to the importance of religion in newspaper readers’ lives. This solution to educate journalists and editors highlights a natural gap between the mass media and religion, as they are “two alien cultures—one rooted largely in a search for facts and the other grounded in a discovery of faith beyond fact” (Siegenthaler, 1993, p. 3).

While the media struggle to find the proper place for religion in their coverage, the American people seem to consistently give priority to religion in their lives. Gallup (2000) polls show religious sentiment is still strong in America, with the rate of Americans reporting religion as very important or fairly important to their lives staying pretty stable over time (hovering around 85% over the past 50 years, with 95% in 1952, and 88% in 2000). Furthermore, according to a 1999 Gallup poll the overwhelming number of Americans believe in God (86%) or a higher power/spirit (8%). Assuming the media reflect popular beliefs, or are driven by circulation, they would not be expected to hold an openly hostile position against religion in general. Indeed, with the societal trend toward religious accommodation and tolerance, the media would be expected to maintain their professional neutrality and follow the current societal mores of respecting every religious belief (Bolce & de Maio, 1999a; Gallup, 2000).

Evangelical Christians, however, seem to think this expectation is not being met in regards to media coverage of their religion. They feel there is a journalistic bias against religion, as polls indicate 46% of evangelical Christians report such a bias while only 28% of the general public clearly identify a bias (Public Agenda Online, 2001). This lopsided view of journalistic bias hints that this group may feel at least its own religious tradition receives excessive negative treatment. It should, however, also be noted that research has detected a “hostile media phenomenon,” suggesting that when people hold a belief strongly they correspondingly feel the media are antagonistic in their coverage of that belief (Vallone, Ross, & Lepper, 1985).

It is possible that commonality is actually the source of conflict between religion and the media, as the media have in many ways usurped the traditional functions of religion. After all, both religion and the media attempt to make sense of the world, and package that understanding in such a way that it can be consumed by the masses. As such, television is seen as mythopoetic, creating the narratives upon which people base their thoughts and life patterns. This concept is akin to Walter Lippmann's (1922) concept of *pseudo-environment*, which was theorized as the picture the media creates of the outside world, which is essential to be properly oriented in a modern democratic society.

Some have plumbed even deeper the parallels and conflict between religion and the mass media, explaining that whereas religion took a key role in the utilization of leisure time in the past, televised entertainment has pushed its way into the lives of Americans in the present (Kuhns, 1969). Priests have been replaced by news anchors and late night TV hosts such as Johnny Carson, and morality is taught through "cop" shows such as *Dragnet* (Schultze, 1990b, Kuhns, 1969). Kuhns (1969) warns of television failing to offer transcendence while simultaneously undermining belief in spiritual absolutes. This supplanting of religion with entertainment is not seen as an overt conspiracy directed at public morals, but is instead the natural outcome as television begins to be the primary generator of social meaning (Wilson, 1982).

As a generator of social meaning, television gives little understanding to religion. A 1993 Media Research Center study concluded that evening news (CNN, PBS, NBC, ABC and CBS) stories focusing on religion accounted for just one percent of all news stories. Even when religion was the primary topic it was typically scorned, and only ABC actually had a religion reporter (Graham & Kaminski, 1993). When religion does make the news, it is often only mentioned without being the center of a story. Buddenbaum (1990) examined the three major networks' broadcasts in 1976, 1981 and 1986, revealing 6 to 11 percent of the stories contained some kind of religious content. She also concluded that while some biased reporting existed, overall the treatment of religion in the news was fair.

The confusing and often conflicting data have caused some theorists to postulate new ways of understanding how the media interact with religion. Some suggest journalists unconsciously adhere to liberal Christian values. Underwood's (in press) study, in which journalists were asked to agree or disagree with Biblical and philosophic statements, revealed journalists agree with and attempt to follow a liberal Christian value system. This leads them to be more critical of conservative and Fundamentalist Christians, and helps explain why liberal Christianity is so under-covered by the mass media (liberal Christianity is mentioned about a quarter of the times conservative Christians are in print news) (Underwood, in press).

The media-religion relationship has also been probed by Silk's (1995) use of the concept of "topos", or commonplace ideas that circulate in a given culture that are readily accessible and credible in discussions. These topoi can be thought of as a cultural common understanding about social, political and religious ideas. Topoi "offer jurors moral principles for rendering judgment" and "provide the focus for journalistic narratives" (Silk, 1995, p. 51). Typically they are most explicitly stated in editorials, but they offer a sort of guiding light to all religious discussions. In his attempt to analyze journalistic practices, Silk discovered various "topoi" that are most often used when journalists cover religious aspects of American life, and claims the media (willingly or not) actually serve to exalt instead of destroy religion. These topoi include good works, tolerance, hypocrisy, false prophecy, inclusion, supernatural belief and declension (decline of religious values in society) (Silk, 1995).

The present research proposes to measure these topoi, along with other variables, in an effort to evaluate how Fundamentalists are portrayed in nighttime news broadcasts. For example, stories on religion frequently deal with issues of the supernatural, which can often be difficult to handle from a journalistic standpoint (Silk, 1995; Underwood, in press). Reporters need to tell stories from the viewpoint of those who were present at news events, but they are also often compelled to interject some elements of doubt beyond mere attribution if natural laws are seemingly violated. It makes sense that



exactly how reporters' skepticism is conveyed sheds light on how the media think about and relate to the particular religion being covered.

While a culture's topoi may change in time, Silk finds little evidence that America's media are becoming increasingly antagonistic toward religion.

Ignorant of religion, even hostile to it, some news professionals may be; but the images of religion that they put on display reflect something other than their personal ignorance or hostility. When the news media set out to represent religion, they do not approach it from the standpoint of the secular confronting the sacred. They are operating with ideas of what religion is and is not, of what it ought and ought not be—with topoi—that derive, to varying degrees, from religious sources. (Silk, 1995, p. 55)

While Silk's (1995) theory, and most of the previous research, have addressed the relationship between religion and print media, few studies have been conducted on religion and television. This is surprising, given the dominance television has acquired. Television viewing is ranked as America's third most frequent activity, behind working and sleeping, as Americans expend about half their leisure time watching television (Neuman, 1991; Robinson, 1981). One study found 98% of America's population own at least one television, nearly 70% have two or more, and the television is on in the average American home for over seven hours a day (Allen, 1992).

Television news may be especially influential. By the late 1960s and early 1970s newspapers fell behind television as the most important source for getting the most and best news, and the decline has continued since then (Ansolabehere, Behr, & Iyengar, 1993; Fowles, 1992). About 50 million Americans watch CBS, NBC or ABC network news on an average evening, and an even greater share of the public watches at least parts of a news broadcast (Ansolabehere et al., 1993). When extraordinary events occur, the television viewing audience comprises about 90% of the U.S. population (Neuman, 1991). Furthermore, television news enjoys the highest trust of any news source at the national and local levels (Kaniss, 1991). If sending conflicting signals, television was

four times as likely to be believed than newspapers, which were ranked the next most credible medium (RoperASW, 2001).

### **Television's New Perspective**

While it may be an overstatement to join with McLuhan (1964) and say the medium is the message, few would argue that the medium does not greatly influence communication. Even Plato recognized that the way we are obliged to conduct our conversations has a strong influence on the ideas we can accurately and succinctly express. The form of public discourse has immediate implications upon that discourse, molding the intellectual and social preoccupations of a society.

Undoubtedly the transition from an oral to a written culture involved some element of societal shock, but the joining of audio and visual images in television has the potential to be even more tumultuous. After all, few cultures achieved high literacy rates and thus the new written communication form mostly affected the intellectual elite (White, 2001). Furthermore, those elite chose to preoccupy themselves with learning to read and write, in effect choosing to be a part of the new communication paradigm. Finally, the written word has only recently obtained the ability to hold near-simultaneous conversation over long distances and to mass audiences, an ability television enjoyed since its inception. Television reaches nearly everyone in American society, with few needing any type of training or learning to comprehend the message. Or at least this is the case on the surface. For the deception of television is that it seems to present the content in a way entirely familiar to the senses, demanding immediate trust as if the viewer were participating in the event. Studies show people are less discriminatory (more trusting) of TV, and perceive newspapers as including more of the journalist's personal perspective (Graber, 1997; Gunther, 1988). Television is also intrusive, forcing everything that requires or desires public attention to be recast in terms most suitable to the medium. This means a proliferation of sound bites, attention-catching visuals, and little discourse that requires time to pause and think (Postman, 1985).

Thought in general is difficult to portray on film, as thinking is a very non-visual event and lucid erudition requires precise definitions and possibly lengthy discussion that

may prompt viewers to stop attending to the message. Because television is less introspective, society's transfer from reading to viewing may have a detrimental impact on religion. As Schleiermacher's (1799/1955) seminal work *On Religion* acknowledged, religion is more than a collection of facts or sterile words; it is also feelings and impressions. Religion involves conversations with God (prayer), as well as "feeling" God's presence, or the unity of worship. These experiences can be shown but not *conveyed* through the cameras, no matter how acute the resolution. Reading a sacred book may also fail to convey all these sensations, but reading allows the individual time to pause and ponder, and individually "connect" emotionally with the deity. Cameras not only fail to capture the spiritual, they also distract the viewers from their own private quests toward God. Indeed it seems the medium with more sense stimulation is less mentally and spiritually nourishing<sup>2</sup>.

The advent of television brings visual images to be the mainstay of society's discourses. This transition not only affects public discourse, but undoubtedly also has ramifications upon private discourse as it even molds language itself. Television can thus reinforce the perception that "seeing is believing." The question arises as to what impact the evolution from printed abstract words to concrete sound bites and images will have upon religion. To date, only a few studies have directly examined media effects on religious beliefs and behaviors, and most of those were indeterminate (Buddenbaum, 1996). Though not focused on religion, one study did find television reinforces the belief in the paranormal, contingent upon the subject's previously having a personal experience of the paranormal (Sparks & Miller, 2001). The impact of television upon people's perception of Christianity has not been fully explored, nor is there reason to believe the impact has concluded.

Similarly, the shift from a written to oral culture raises questions about how much people learn from the media. Comparisons of print media and television suggest people learn more from print than from television (DeFleur, Davenport, Cronin & DeFleur,

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<sup>2</sup> Christianity may be especially affected by this transition, given its emphasis upon the abstract Word (*dabar/logos*), and its insistence that God not be represented by images (see John 1:1 and Deuteronomy

1992; Guo & Moy, 1998; Robinson & Levy, 1986). More particular to religion, one study determined reading the Bible to be a far superior method of gaining religious understanding than watching religious broadcasting (Gaddy & Pritchard, 1986). It was determined that reading the Bible is a much more effective method of instruction, and that “religious broadcasts, particularly those on television, are relatively ineffective in providing audience members, particularly protestants, with religious knowledge” (Gaddy & Pritchard, 1986, p. 844).

Though slightly dated, one analysis has found distinct differences in how the major television networks portray news. According to Nimmo and Combs (1985), ABC uses a “good grief” style that shades religion as being irrational and out-of-control. CBS opts more for a “that’s the way it is” attitude, displaying facts and expert opinion that is likely alienated from the way viewers think of religion. Finally, while NBC suggests the events are embedded in a complex web of social, political, religious and economic forces, it fails to draw connections between these forces, thereby potentially confusing viewers (Nimmo & Combs, 1985).

Few other differences between the networks have been detected. In general, each national network uses an average of 25 graphics a night, with ABC using more graphics than the other two networks (Foote & Saunders, 1990). Also, an analysis covering several months of the 1984 presidential campaign showed NBC was generally more politically biased against the Reagan/Bush ticket than were the other two networks, but all the networks proved to be more neutral than political pundits claimed (Lowry, 1985).

Besides the portrayal of religion on newscasts, television has also been theorized to be a cultural competitor with religion, vying for the status of the supreme informer and interpreter of history (Newman, 1996). If television is indeed a competitor with religion, it is important to get a sense for what it is teaching. A list of possibilities theorized by Schultze (1990b) includes: (a) good triumphs over evil; (b) evil is an aberration in the world caused by evil people; (c) evil can be eliminated by eliminating evil people; (d) all

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5:8). These prohibitions were set in place to ensure God’s transcendence, as only a very abstract concept could be useful in conceptualizing a universal God.

things work for good for those who believe in themselves and their society; and (e) society can be redeemed by the good and moral actions of good people.

This list includes many of the problems that religion typically handles, offering a reason for evil in the world, a solution to the problem, and even a redemption plan. Indeed, “television has traded a mysterious and unexplainable concept of God for a more humanly understandable one,” in which God works through people, and His justice is equated with human justice (Schultze, 1990b, p. 246).

In conclusion, it is possible that television may be a less successful medium for conveying religion, and especially Christianity, than was the previous paradigm of text. Television breaks discourse into simple sound bites which may betray the complex nature of religion, and television’s tendency toward entertainment makes it distracting even when its content asks viewers to draw close to God. Furthermore, it has been hypothesized that television may in fact compete with religion for the necessary function of story teller, information disseminator, and myth maker in society. While the nature of the relationship between religion and television still lacks thorough empirical research, there is ample evidence to suggest the relationship is not entirely harmonious.

The lack of harmony that may be due to the very nature of television may be exacerbated by journalists when they report about religion. Beyond simply being a different medium in which to discuss religion, television must be understood as a mediated form of communication. It is therefore capable of being manipulated to present a limited or even distorted view of events (Fiske, 1991). This distortion occurs both intentionally and unintentionally, and can best be described by the communications theory of framing. Before discussing framing, which involves how journalists “contextualize” a subject, it is important to understand the norms to which journalists have traditionally adhered.

### **Objectivity**

Prevailing journalistic standards dictate that news be presented as objectively as possible (Lambeth, Meyer, & Thorson, 1998). The difficulty lies in defining “objectivity,” and that definitional challenge in fact foreshadows the entire debate as to

whether or not it is possible to be objective. One side of the debate expresses the tension that all observations are inescapably intertwined with the observer's cultural and historical background, preventing any truly "objective" standard (McKinzie, 1994). Accusations are also made that the "objectivity" standard is itself a negative "ideology" that favors the status quo and "undermines the personal integrity of journalists who are required to set aside their consciences" (Glasser, 1992, p. 176). Furthermore, opponents of objectivity critique the notion that there is an external reality, or a single view that best describes what occurred *in fact*.

The other side of the debate typically acknowledges the epistemological objections, and so attempts to define objectivity in such a way that it can be operationalized as a professional norm to prevent biased framing from influencing the public (i.e., framing effects). Only when objectivity is defined can journalistic abuses such as "bias" or "skewed reporting" be intelligible. Objectivity "implies being truthful, unbiased, fair and balanced," but at the same time should not detach the journalist from an issue (Cohen & Elliot, 1997, p. 54). Stress is thus placed on reporting information that is newsworthy, not inventing the "newsworthiness" of information. Indeed, objectivity can be seen as a core value of journalists, as they attempt to ensure people are listening to one another and getting the opportunity to be heard (Lambeth et al., 1998).

Reporters are educated about the debate over objectivity in the hopes that awareness of the difficulties may in itself prevent some of the abuses (Cohen & Elliot, 1997). The forces fighting against the objective journalistic standard are legion, including the tendency to distort by editorializing, embellishing, sensationalizing, and using "loaded words."

Even if objectivity is rejected as a concept, and news is understood as a "social construction of reality," it is professionally important to report news with as little intentional bias and framing as possible (Tuchman, 1978, p. ix). News must be verified not only to ensure libel litigation is deterred, but also to ensure the continued viability of the news organization. News without credibility becomes entertainment. Among other practices, credibility is maintained by questioning sources, crosschecking personal

witness accounts, and using attribution to ensure information is seen as a viewpoint and not as objective fact. Whenever statements are made that seem counter to other observable facts, the counter position are mentioned and sources cited (Tuchman, 1978).

There is evidence that news broadcasters are more prone than print journalists to reject the notion of objectivity (Johnstone, Slawski, & Bowman, 1976). Technological differences driving news production may also threaten “to over-ride the need for solid, informative, accurate, factual and neutral reporting” (Gunter, 1997, p. 164). This may make television news not only more prone to framing, but prone to intentional frames devised by broadcasters to interject their own viewpoints.

### **Framing**

Much study has been accomplished on how and to what extent the mass media influence public opinion. From the 1920s “magic bullet” notion of the media fully controlling the minds of target audiences to the more sophisticated contingent media effects models, communications theorists have tried to understand to what degree the public is influenced and how that influence occurs (McLeod, Kosicki, & Pan, 1991). Questions then arise as to whether the media simply reflect the often mutable public attitude toward various kinds of issues or whether the media have some sort of hidden agenda.

Indeed, according to Tuchman (1978), framing in a journalistic context is broadly defined as organizing events due to personal subjective involvement with them. This means framing is inevitable, and it “ignores the possibility that order is an intrinsic characteristic of the everyday world” (Tuchman, 1978, p. 192). Frames are thus seen as turning “amorphous talk into a discernible event,” and while the frame organizes everyday reality, it is itself “part and parcel of everyday reality” (Tuchman, 1978, pp. 192-193). Lippmann (1922) seemed to concur with this assessment, as he stated a journalist’s perspective is constructed “out of his own stereotypes, according to his own code, and by the urgency of his own interest” (p. 272). This ubiquitous understanding of framing is useful for journalists in defending their work, but framing should also be

understood as a more complex phenomenon, as reflected in its investigation by communications scholars.

Framing from a communications theory perspective emerged to replace ideas such as the “magic bullet” notion of communications. Though this theory has often been described as a “fractured paradigm” (Entman, 1993), it has recently been clarified by Scheufele’s (1999) process model, which describes framing as occurring in four cyclical stages. “Frame building” occurs as journalists construct stories, and then “frame setting” is when those frames are “set” upon the public by mass dissemination. These frames then must run through individual cognition processes in a stage called “individual-level effects framing,” which results in the final stage dubbed “societal frames.” Finally, it is noted that journalists themselves are acted upon by societal frames, impacting their construction of the original “frame building” stage. This model links micro and macro effects, with connections happening as people interpret the media’s broadcasts and as the media are seen as part of the audience susceptible to being shaped by societal norms (Scheufele, 1999).

Intentional frame building occurs as journalists “select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (Entman, 1993, p. 52). This is accomplished in a text by the “presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments” (Entman, 1993, p. 52). Frames are thus the context that is communicated with the text, which can shape the way text is received. Frames typically diagnose, evaluate and prescribe (Gamson, 1992). Because of this, they are capable of exerting great social power when they are encoded in terms or phrases, and once the term or phrase is widely accepted, communicators cannot use other words without risking being misunderstood or lacking credibility (Gamson, 1992). In this way a frame can actually influence language. Indeed, “the power of a frame can be as great as that of language itself” (Entman, 1993, p. 55). It should be noted, however, that while



frames typically have a common effect on large portions of the receiving audience, their effects are not necessarily universal. Effects may also be subtle, and thus very difficult to locate (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997).

In fact, journalists may even unwittingly construct frames when they seek expert opinion and advice (Nelson, Clawson, & Oxley, 1997). Looking to enhance their stories, journalists will often rely on quotes, insight and analysis from “individuals eager to promote a certain perspective to a broader public audience” (Nelson et al., 1997, p. 568). At the same time, journalists may themselves have an agenda they wish to propagate, and while such an agenda may be acceptable and even lauded when it is for things such as world peace or to combat hunger, it can be deceptive when subtly applied to news as a frame.

“Frame setting” is the process of transmitting the frame, typically via the mass media. Naturally embedded within a text, frames are subtly transported to the audience where they “influence opinions by stressing specific values, facts, and other considerations, endowing them with greater relevance to the issue than they might appear to have under an alternate frame” (Nelson et al., 1997, p. 569). Clearly much can be lost or gained in this transmission process, and frames may be so blatant that they are consciously recognized or so subtle as to be nearly imperceptible. Indeed, a person’s background and memory play a large factor in deciding which frames are most accessible, and thus which ones have the greatest cognitive impact (Hastie & Park, 1986; Iyengar, 1990; Tversky & Kahneman, 1973).

After media frames are built and transmitted they are interpreted at the individual level. Often these mentally stored clusters of ideas that guide individuals’ processing of information are called “schemata” or “scripts” instead of frames (Entman, 1993). Schemata form not only due to a frame’s salience in a text, but also due to repetition, placement and reinforcing associations. Schemata form as people actively sort, reorganize and filter information in personally significant ways (Neuman, Just, & Crigler, 1992). Often the initial frame used on a news story will guide the course of subsequent reporting, rendering one basic interpretation more readily discernable and conflicting

interpretations difficult to comprehend or remember (Entman, 1991). This naturally gives weight to elite (or government) perspectives, as they often are a part of the event and have the opportunity to initially frame an event.

Research using open ended questions finds that media frames are indeed incorporated into audience frames (schemata), but that the audience often pays attention to different aspects of the frame than the media may originally have thought was central (Huang, 1996 as cited in Scheufele, 1999).

Other research concurs that media frames impact audience frames, and suggests media frames from both news and entertainment are found incorporated into schemata on important public issues (Sotirovic, 2000). The media's role, however, may involve providing individuals with multiple solutions to issues as opposed to endorsing and imposing a particular position (Sotirovic, 2000). The resulting mosaic of schemata then makes up the resulting societal frame.

There are potentially many factors that play into one's susceptibility to media frames. Conceivably, many frames are transparent to some while being easily detected by others. Indeed, education may be a bulwark against frame susceptibility, in that students are frequently asked to be critical and to create their own linkages that are not explicit in texts (Entman, 1993). Education has also been found to be an effective bulwark for resisting certain types of propaganda messages (Hovland, Lumsdaine, & Sheffield, 1949).

However, Kahneman and Tversky (1984) and Iyengar (1993) argue that for many matters of political interest, the general populace is not well enough informed, and frames may play a heavier role in impacting cognitive responses. The public's knowledge of religion is also less than comprehensive (Gallup, 2001c), making it all the more important to systematically recognize and categorize prevalent frames. Furthermore, personal predispositions and issue interpretations may dictate which frames have stronger effects (Shah, Domke, & Wackman, 1996). Careful research in this area promises to not only assist the public in identifying how religious issues are framed, but also will help journalists realize the frames they are using.

The final process of Scheufele's (1999) model recognizes journalists are also part of the audience. As such the very frames originally constructed and conveyed by the media, having been processed through individual-level effects, influence the media's creation of further frames. Members of the media are also consumers of the media, and it can be imagined that they are not only after the information, but also attempting to improve their own jobs. Just like in any other business, if they see a product that is well constructed (in this case an important concept that is expressed succinctly and adeptly) they will take notes and incorporate the new invention. The term "news wave" has been used to describe this initially localized dissemination and then exacerbated transmission and repetition of features of newscasts (Fishman, 1980).

Some research helps clarify why so many news-producing individuals stress the same elements in order to create a "news waves." Price, Tewksbury, and Powers (1997) propose that there are some basic values that essentially under-gird all American journalism. These values are used to assess if a story deserves space in print or airtime on television and radio, and are also kept in mind when reporting news so as to fortify stories to make them more interesting. The five most important criteria for assessing if a story is newsworthy are impact, conflict, familiarity, proximity, and timeliness (Graber, 1997).

Impact involves making the story relevant to the news audience. The assumption is that people do not need just the abstract facts, but wish to see how those facts impact themselves or their neighbors. Thus stories about inflation or trade deficits may be couched in terms of a local woman seeing grocery prices rise (Graber, 1997).

Conflict excites audiences, and is thus sometimes imposed upon stories. Reporting about wars, murders, and scandals not only adds interest because these are unusual events, but they also involve the entertainment value of action. Conflict can even be seen in political news stories, particularly those involving electoral policies, which are presented as "events that clearly pit candidates against each other, emphasizing conflict regardless of whether events themselves clearly suggest it" (Price et al., p. 484).

Familiarity is important because the public is more interested in learning about well-known people or celebrities. "People value the feeling of intimacy that comes from knowing details of a famous person's life" (Graber, 1997, p. 107). Proximity as a news value assumes people want to know what is going on in the local area more than they wish to know what is going on elsewhere. Often larger news stories are thus localized. Finally, timeliness is important. The best news is something that has occurred recently, but that is also novel. Of these news values, conflict, proximity and timeliness are seen as most important (Graber, 1997).

Other limitations may also hold sway on the selection of news, due simply to the nature of the medium. For television news, stories are best that are not too complex so that they can be quickly explained within a specified time slot. Stories with stunning graphics or visuals are also preferred, with some stories needing to be rejected or greatly curtailed simply because there is nothing of interest to watch during the narrative (Kaniss, 1991).

With the current ubiquity of mass media, anyone who wishes to sound credible must market his or her ideas in tightly packaged size morsels that in effect create frames for processing news (Gamson, 1992). These information packages are more powerful if they follow previously understood cultural narrative patterns, and indeed these types of patterns are what seems to be used by the media to determine the newsworthiness of a story.

In conclusion, framing can be broken down into four phases: frame building, frame setting, individual-level effects framing, and societal frames. Framing in general is complex, occurring both intentionally and unintentionally. This study is focused on the frame setting function, as it examines the content of television newscasts to determine which frames are present. While no "magic bullet" is to be expected, it would be remiss to assume framing has no impact without making some investigation, especially given the ubiquity of the media in contemporary American society.

### **Exploring the Media's Portrayal of Fundamentalists**

Little empirical data have been gathered as to how Fundamentalists are portrayed in the media. Some extrapolations from data gathered on religion in general, coupled with data of a more demographic nature, may offer at least a glimpse of this portrayal.

While religion in general receives little attention from the media, Fundamentalism is comparatively over-represented (Buddenbaum, 1990). This most likely represents not so much a singling out of a certain religion for unfavorable scrutiny as it is “a response to a definition of religion news that emphasizes public affairs reporting with violence and conflict news value” (Buddenbaum, 1990, p. 256). Such a perception is clearly shared by a number of Catholic priests, who reported dissatisfaction with the media and complained that journalists are “interested only in the sensational, the shocking, the scandalous and not necessarily in the more staid and less dramatic” (Buddenbaum, 1990, p. 250).

An analysis of major network coverage of religion confirmed, “the dominant feature of religion news on secular network newscasts is that it is not primarily about religion” (Buddenbaum, 1990, p. 252). At least half of the stories involving religion had some sort of political dispute as the main theme. Evidence also indicates fundamentalist Christians are stronger proponents of mixing religion and politics, as polls show 73% of evangelical Christians (the data was not further broken down to Fundamentalists) report thinking laws and policies would be better if the “elected officials were deeply religious,” compared to the general public’s 47% (Public Agenda Online, 2001). Evidence that this sentiment is reciprocated within the Republican Party may be indicated as President George W. Bush supports funding religious social services programs with federal aid (Lacey, 2001). It is thus possible that Fundamentalists get more coverage than other religious groups because they find themselves embroiled in social or political controversy that naturally has higher news value than religion alone.

Due to the preponderance of mixing religion with other issues in reporting, it is also possible that Fundamentalists will often be labeled explicitly as belonging to a certain political group, most likely a conservative Party. Furthermore, Fundamentalists may be vulnerable to being labeled intolerant, especially since Christian orthodoxy has

been found to be a negative predictor of tolerance for freedom of speech and press, and church attendance has been found to be a slightly weaker predictor of the same (von Elten & Rimmer, 1992). Other overt labels (e.g., cult<sup>3</sup>) are important to analyze when searching for frames, as labeling is prone to generate stereotypes (Buddenbaum, 1996).

The most relevant study to the present research is Kerr and Moy's (in press) investigation of more than 2,600 articles from U.S. newspapers nationwide looking at the portrayal of Fundamentalists. Their overall finding is that fundamentalist Christians have received a constant but only slightly negative depiction over the past 20 years. Specific aspects of this portrayal included showing Fundamentalists as being somewhat intolerant, criminal minded, forceful in imposing their viewpoint on others, involved in politics and even somewhat violent.

Other interesting findings show the number of articles (which included news stories, feature stories, editorials, letters to the editor, weekly columnists, among others) more than tripled between 1983 and 1984, rose again in 1994, and continued to grow through 2000. Nearly a quarter of all articles had politics as their primary topic. Politics may also have influenced the finding that Fundamentalists were portrayed as slightly unpatriotic in even-numbered (congressional election) years, and more so in odd-numbered years.

### **Research Questions**

With the vast majority of research being directed at detecting the quantity or quality of religious coverage in general, little has been accomplished to better understand more specifically how journalists report on different religions. Perhaps the conflicting past research as to how journalists cover religion is due to amalgamating all religions into one category, and what is needed is more in-depth content analyses of how journalists have covered specific religious groups. This approach may tease out nuances that are

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<sup>3</sup> There is widespread disagreement as to what exactly defines a cult (Enroth, 1999a), and some argue that Christian Fundamentalists should be exempt from the label. First, Fundamentalism's popularity in the U.S., estimated by Simpson (1983) to be as high as 30%, suggests it is in no way a small or isolated phenomena (see Sigelman & Presser, 1988 for further discussion of 30% figure). Second, cults are typically defined by unorthodoxy in doctrine, whereas Fundamentalists are ultra orthodox (McIntire, 1997b).

hidden in more macro level analyses, and would also provide an ability to compare the portrayals of individual religions to better understand the media's portrayal of religion.

The present research can be seen as an extension of the Kerr and Moy (in press) newspaper study, as both studies together take the first step toward understanding the portrayal of Fundamentalists. This specific religious group is here analyzed by studying all major network television media coverage over a 20-year period. This study is capable not only of revealing how Fundamentalists have been portrayed by television news, but can then be coupled with the previous newspaper research (Kerr & Moy, in press) to provide a strong statement of how the media in general have portrayed Christian Fundamentalists.

Because so little past research has been done focusing on fundamentalist Christians, it is necessary to formulate some general research questions instead of being able to state more specific hypotheses. These research questions derive in part from the historical and political review in Chapter Two, as well as from the Kerr and Moy (in press) research on print journalism. The first research question is:

RQ1: How have national nightly news broadcasts portrayed fundamentalist Christians between 1980 and 2000? More specifically, what has been the reason Fundamentalists made the news, what specific features are typically portrayed, and what is the overall impression given about Fundamentalists in these news broadcasts?

It is also possible that television networks have not portrayed Fundamentalists in an identical manner. Both qualitative and quantitative aspects of network portrayal need to be assessed, leading to the second research question:

RQ2: Are there any differences between networks in how they covered Fundamentalists over this time period?

Finally, in order to advance knowledge in this area instead of merely working in isolation, the present research needs to connect with the previous Kerr and Moy (in press) study, asking:

RQ3: How does television nightly news coverage compare with newspaper coverage of Fundamentalists over the same time period?



### **Chapter III: Methods**

The Vanderbilt Television Archive at Nashville, TN, contains a complete record of all national news broadcasts since 1968, and a search of its evening news abstracts from 1980-2000 revealed a population of 33 news broadcasts containing the words “fundamentalist” or “fundamentalism” applied to the term “Christian.” The entire population was content analyzed by two trained graduate students, with an 81% agreement.

The video clips averaged around four minutes each, and the two coding sets were averaged to form the final data set. For items where averaging would be inaccurate due to one of the coders not detecting the presence of a variable while the other coder did detect the variable’s presence, the final data set was formed by alternating these coder responses within each variable.

#### **Coding Instrument**

The areas coded can be broadly divided into five categories, which formed the divisions on the code sheet (Appendix 1). The first category involves mainly descriptive data, such as the network (ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX or CNN), date and time of the news clip. It also includes an evaluation to determine the news value of each clip, with categories of novelty, change, conflict, consensus, human interest and other. The last item in the first section is a list of eleven topics that were determined by Buddenbaum (1996) to often coincide with religion. These topics are military/guerilla/terrorism, politics/government, law/crime/courts, business/labor/economics, culture/entertainment, science/medicine, education, media, social services, lifestyle/behavior, and important people. A final category of “religion” is included for stories where only religion can be said to be focus of the story. Operational definitions of all the variables can be found in Appendix 2.

#### **Section two: Audio explicit terms**

The second section is used to probe for explicit use of key words such as cult, sect, religious group, separatists, minority, majority, right/conservative and extremist/radicals. These terms have become nuanced in the American vernacular such that “sect” today

implies a minority religion status while “cult” connotes the same definition but with derogatory undertones. Even more benign labels such as “minority” or “majority” are assessed to determine how Fundamentalists groups’ power in society is portrayed, and the use of labels such as “separationist,” “conservative,” and “extremist” may hint at a relationship between religion and politics.

### **Section three: Visual indicators**

Typical visuals of religious coverage are able to be recorded in section three of the code sheet, with four-point ordinal scales measuring the level of excitement in worship and preaching. In these instances, “excitement” conceptually means the degree of emotion demonstrated by adherents. This involves facial expressions, waving hands, swaying bodies or verbally responsive congregations (saying things like “amen” or “speaking in tongues”). The level of negative emotional activity (or “upset-ness”) is also rated for both Fundamentalists and their opponents in a story. This measurement is included to assist in determining if Fundamentalists are portrayed as much more aggravated than their opponents, or if the debate is portrayed as equally heated on both sides. Calm discussion would show peacefulness whereas active demonstration, chanting, picketing and violence would be rated as being pictured “very upset.” For these variables a “did not display” category was also included and coded with a zero as absence seemed more closely aligned with “calm worship” or “not at all upset” than with the other extreme of the variables.

### **Section four: Gestalt topoi and other variables**

Though it is more of a subjective measurement, the overall impression a news clip leaves with the audience is important to capture. Silk’s topoi (1995) concepts are first probed, as the code sheet not only helps determine if the seven religious topoi are present, but also assists to classify the depiction.

Silk’s (1995) first topos is tolerance, which is defined as the ability to sympathize with or accept as valid (though not *agree* with) beliefs contrary to one’s own. This is not so much a measurement of the level of disagreement with other viewpoints, but is instead

the ability to accept such differences in a respectful/rational manner (including the ability to “agree to disagree”).

Though Silk (1995) calls his second topos “hypocrisy,” this construct is captured under the term “sincerity,” which lends itself to a bipolar evaluation. The scale rates the perception of Fundamentalists as being trustworthy, dependable, or reliable, with outright “hypocrisy” being equated with “very insincere.”

Silk (1995) asserts that the media presume religion must be out to do good deeds, and thus can be hostile if they perceive religion to be doing otherwise. “Good deeds” include anything from helping the poor to missionary work teaching people to read and giving out medicine. Though the scale uses quantity terminology (some/many), it also involves the quality of the good deed performed (while donating 10 million dollars is just one act, it is considered a very good act and thus is coded as “do many good deeds”). Coders considered the amount of the gift or the quality of the deed in relation to the giver’s means (a billionaire giving \$1000 is less of a good deed than a high school student making such a donation earned from car washes).

The topos of prophecy, as defined by Silk (1995), addresses more than mere incorrect predictions of future events. It also involves propagating blatantly false doctrine, often for the religious leader’s own financial gain. This idea is linked with “brainwashing” or coercing adherents to give more to the religious group than an average American would deem reasonable. The “very falsely prophetic” would include people like suicide cults and Scientology’s founder L. Ron Hubbard who referred to potential converts as “raw meat” (Silk, 1995, p. 97). Television evangelist scandals may also be captured by this variable.

One topos that is bounded by a nationalistic sense is Silk’s (1995) “inclusion” category. In this research, the variable measures the strength of feeling that Fundamentalists should be included and accepted as a part of the American system and national identity. The scale ranges from “should be excluded entirely” from the national identity to acknowledging that Fundamentalism is “part of U.S. identity.”

Reporters' level of skepticism about Fundamentalists' adherence to supernatural beliefs is also rated on an ordinal scale, ranging from "very skeptical of supernatural" to "very accepting of supernatural". Balanced coverage occurs when both skepticism and confidence are equally expressed. Efforts to give alternate explanations after showing fairly substantial evidence is "a little skeptical," and in cases where the reporter seems at a loss for explanation, "somewhat accepting" is coded. "Very accepting" is reserved for stories where reporters themselves seemed convinced, or else allowed the preponderance of the evidence to point toward supernatural activity.

Silk's (1995) final topos is "declension," meaning the speculation the media gives about the decline of religion. Media references to Fundamentalists as "outdated" or "dwindling in numbers" would imply declension, whereas reference to Fundamentalism's growth or "spreading" would be the opposite of declension.

### **Other gestalt variables**

After the topos concepts, various variables were chosen to be observed for different reasons, mostly deriving from the historical analysis in Chapter Two and the Kerr and Moy (in press) research. These variables include intelligence, responsibility, criminal mindedness, patriotism, racism, forcing views upon others, and violent tendencies.

Chapter Two discusses how Fundamentalists often are labeled as being "backwards" or even stupid, due in part to the Scopes monkey trial in 1925. The intelligence scale measures the degree to which this kind of labeling occurs, ranging from "very unintelligent" to "very intelligent". Evidence for movement on this scale is not only explicit references, but also implicit references, such as referring to limited education level or irrational behaviors.

The historical analysis also reveals some question has been posed as to Fundamentalists' ability to be responsible and law abiding. Responsibility is the ability to handle obligations and own up to one's opinions and actions, with irresponsibility being negligence, blame shifting, and failing to do normal practices such as parents caring for their own children. The law-abiding scale measures the willingness of

portrayals need to be understood to improve reporting and to avoid any unintentionally negative frames. In this research, portrayals of Fundamentalists as being violent should be particularly scrutinized to ensure the portrayal is justified. The danger is that inaccurate portrayals may lead to a stereotype about fundamentalists, which in turn may even lead to a negative attitude about the entire religion (whose founder declared blessings on peacemakers and taught non-resistance). Furthermore, portrayals of Fundamentalists may have ramifications in the political realm, as the two topics seem indelibly linked in the media. It is certainly a dangerous thing to stereotype any population based on their religious preferences and practices, and it is even more dangerous if that stereotyping has influence over political votes and action (Bolce & de Maio, 1999b).

It is possible that the mild but constant antipathy shown toward Fundamentalists, as evidenced by the thermometer data, is actually a more potent finding than may be understood at first glance. After all, this negativity appears despite journalistic norms. Still, the evidence falls far short of backing Fundamentalists' contentions that "media coverage of religion tends only to report those actions and statements that reinforce a negative stereotype" (Reed, 1996b, p. 68). Overall this research suggests the professional network news media have done a fair job of reporting objectively. This objectivity applies equally to the three original network news stations, with the only discernable difference detected in the portrayal of patriotism. The preponderance of the evidence suggests Fundamentalists who maintain the media are unduly biased against them must look elsewhere for substantiation.

One place to look for such substantiation might be the entertainment industry. Michael Medved in *Hollywood vs. America* said "negative attitude toward Judeo-Christian believers is so pervasive and so passionately held in Hollywood that some producers will use every opportunity to express their contempt" (Medved, 1992, p. 64). Examples of entertainment television belittling Fundamentalists abound, and even popular movies deride Fundamentalists. One such movie is *Aliens 3*, as it portrays a monster attacking a penal colony in outer space populated by rapists and murderers who

are twice identified as fundamentalist Christians (Reed, 1996b). Since the evidence seems to acquit both print and television journalists from strong bias, future research is warranted to better understand the portrayal of Fundamentalists in entertainment oriented media outlets.

The evidence suggests television journalists are attempting to give an accurate and objective picture of Fundamentalists. This is despite Reed's (1996b) contention that of all religious peoples, "Fundamentalists are the easiest target" for negative media coverage (p. 57). Instead of simply relegating coverage to controversy alone, some religious practices are being shown. More than 40% of the news clips show some type of worship, and over half show preaching/speaking. Both worship and preaching were not shown as being wild affairs nor as extremely boring events, but averaged around "a little animated." Furthermore, the level of "upsetness" was about the same between Fundamentalists and their opposition, further suggesting some balance in reporting.

More surprisingly, journalists did not show a large amount of skepticism toward the Fundamentalists' belief in the supernatural. This balance is despite the fact that reporting naturally involves skepticism, whereas religion naturally requires faith. Correlational data give a unique glimpse into what journalists may have used as a criterion for evaluating Fundamentalists. Specifically, when Fundamentalists are portrayed at higher levels of excitement in their speaking, the overall impressions are more negative, they are more often shown as declining in numbers, and they are shown as being less responsible and less patriotic.

While much of the data support the current methods of depicting Fundamentalism, some questions remain. Specifically, why is so little attention given to religion? Though the reason may simply be that religion is not in demand by news consumers, at least one reader poll found religion is neither the most *nor the least* important subject needing coverage, suggesting other causes may be at work (Hoover, 1998). Judging from the current study, it is possible that religion is too mundane, and that it needs "spicing up" with controversy to make it newsworthy. Indeed, though there was a fair dispersion of news clips shown between 5:30 p.m. and 6:50 p.m., the 5:30 clips

(presumably top stories) involved the lively topics of accusing Fundamentalists of being racist, Fundamentalists supporting Reagan's bid for reelection, and the morality of impeaching Clinton. While the news value of conflict/violence portrayed Fundamentalists in the most negative light and made the top story, the news value of novelty was the most positive.

It should also not be ruled out that the media are simply playing to their constituency, as Fundamentalists have been shown to be less consumers of secular media while more often imbibing of their own religious publications (Rigney & Hoffman, 1993; Hoover, 1998). Television news therefore may not cover Fundamentalists very much nor very positively because Fundamentalists are not seen as being an important demographic of their viewing audience (nor corporate sponsorship). Perhaps the very abandonment of "worldly news" has led to the news being less concerned with catering to the Fundamentalists' needs. The low number of newspaper editors self-identifying with a Fundamentalist-prone denomination (only 7% are Presbyterians and 3% Southern Baptists) suggests there may also be a low number of Fundamentalist Christian television news editors (Hynds, 1999). More research is warranted to determine if this is indeed the case, and to ferret out any differences religious persuasion may have upon news coverage.

### **Study Limitations and Future Research**

The present study is not without limitations. While having a narrow definition of Fundamentalists makes the findings more clear as to what subject is being investigated, it also makes the study a bit limited by only having 33 news clips. Despite ensuring the subject under investigation was well defined, the media themselves sometimes confuse religious terms and misapply them, suggesting a broader conceptualization of this religious group may be warranted. While *The Associated Press Stylebook's* guidance as to the use of the label "Fundamentalist" should have ensured the label was used correctly, the stylebook is clearly often not followed, and the general rule to prohibit use may have limited the population size. Furthermore, there is as yet no information explaining how narrowly the television news viewing audience defines these religious labels. Such an

understanding would be important to research potential media effects, and may find that a more inclusive definition is needed to match the public's understanding of what a "fundamentalist" is.

While great lengths were taken to find conceptual and operational definitions based on past research, such knowledge was for the most part lacking. Among other things, this led to some variables being more or less extraneous. Though Silk's (1995) topoi theory proved useful, categories such as false prophecy and religious deeds were seldom used to classify Fundamentalist Christians. Other research may be warranted to further investigate if these topoi are used more frequently with other faith groups.

As with most studies, the present research found some information should have been coded that was absent. Perhaps the most conspicuous is the lack of a variable identifying if the news clip was using the term "Fundamentalist" in its historical Protestant religious sense. This study ensured the historical and social aspects of Fundamentalism were explored, but did not use such data to create a variable with which to analyze television coverage. This oversight should be amended in future studies of Fundamentalists, and even content analyses of other religious groups may benefit from a variable that detects how accurately the media are in using specific religious labels.

While this content analysis reveals Fundamentalists have been portrayed with mild negativity, it can in no way explain if that negative coverage is due to journalistic bias and framing or if in fact Fundamentalists deserve a negative reputation with respect to the rest of society. It could certainly be that the media *are* being objective, and that an objective viewpoint still declares Fundamentalist to be somewhat intolerant, politically involved, and prone to try to force their view upon others. However, objectivity is not the only norm that constrains or defines news reports. Graber's (1997) criteria for assessing newsworthiness includes evaluations of a story's impact, conflict, familiarity, proximity, and timeliness. In addition, television is more suited for stunning graphics or visuals (Kaniss, 1991). These aspects may be more culpable for other portrayals of Fundamentalists, such as the more vivid attributes of being more than a little racist and somewhat violent. The main point is to recognize content analysis allows observation



only of how the media have portrayed Fundamentalists, but is not effective in gauging the accuracy of such portrayals. Competing norms and news values further complicate analysis.

Perhaps the greatest contribution of this research is its illuminating the relatively untouched ground of content analysis as applied to understanding the mass media for their treatment of specific religious groups. While this study contributes to our knowledge of the relationship between media and religion on its own, its importance could be greatly magnified by future similar studies of other Christian denominations and other faiths. Comparing these studies may clarify the often conflicting data that emerge from studies treating religion as a single homogenous variable.

Conducting similar research on other faiths and sects, such as Islam or Hindu, may generate data as to how religious ideas have progressed in the U.S. Additionally, research specifically targeting fundamentalist Islam or Hindu could be paired with the present research to gather additional evidence for how the media treat those who are more dedicated to a radical faith.

Research may also be warranted to discover how the terrorist actions of September 11, 2001, affected the portrayal of Fundamentalist Christians on the nightly news. This research could further probe the potentially confusing label of “fundamentalist,” and see if the actions of fundamentalist Islam have repercussions upon the feelings toward fundamentalist Christians. Some evidence suggests credible sources in the mass media have confused these religious groups. One article in *Christianity Today* claims *The New York Times* and the London *Guardian* have both “devoted a bewildering amount of space to shrill essays that equate many fundamentalists (be they Christian, Jews, or Muslims) with Usama bin Laden’s homicidal minions” (“A Secular” 2002, p. 30). The article suggests “‘fundamentalist’ has become a rhetorical weapon of mass destruction” (“A Secular,” 2002, p. 30).

Future research is also called for in a continuing effort to understand if there is any foundation to the Fundamentalist cry of a biased media. While both the present study and the Kerr and Moy (in press) study reveal television news and newspapers have a

Fundamentalists to support the laws in America, including whether they wish those laws bent or broken. It ranges from “very criminal minded” to “very law-abiding”.

Though similar to the “inclusion” topos, a general “patriotism” variable was included. This variable measures the degree to which the media portray Fundamentalists as being proud of their country and what it stands for as well as supporters of the democratic system and the *United States Constitution*. Suggestions that they are against the government, or against taxes, etc. may show lack of patriotism (though evading taxes may be coded under “law-abiding/criminal-minded” if the news clip specifically mentions breaking the law). This variable ranges from “very unpatriotic” to “very patriotic”.

All of the above section four “Gestalt” variables are measured on five-point ordinal scales, with the addition of a rating for “did not mention.” The following variables did not lend themselves to having a middle or “balanced” category, so they were scored on four-point scales, with “did not mention” being scored with a zero (not mentioning a negative characteristic was deemed to be closer to its absence than recognizing a strong presence).

The racism scale includes the categories “not at all racist,” “a little racist,” “somewhat racist,” and “very racist”. Racism is conceptually defined as belittling others due to their cultural or ethnic background. “Not at all racist” is used when the story shows Fundamentalists uniting the races, trying to mend past harms or trying to diversify churches. This unification of races under God is explicitly stated as one of the seven purposes the Promise Keepers movement (Promise Keepers, 2001). “Very racist” would include explicit reference to Fundamentalists as being racist, or somehow being related to known racist groups (Nazis or Klu Klux Klan).

While toleration has already been discussed, another variable of “forcing views upon others” is necessary to understand the media’s portrayal of Fundamentalists. This variable involves coercing or forcing viewpoints and values upon others, not merely proselytizing or sharing the faith. As discussed earlier, fundamentalist Christians believe their way to God is the only way. This variable captures the degree to which they are

shown as compelling others to follow their ways/behaviors, or forcing their religious customs or traditions upon the public. “Not at all forcing their views on others” is coded when Fundamentalists clearly have their own differing viewpoints, but refuse to place those standards or values where they will impact others. “A little forceful” involves peer pressure, whereas “somewhat forceful” includes stronger coercion such as mild threats or systemic pressures. “Very forceful” includes physical coercion or enacting laws or local policies that are somehow enforced.

Suicide is broadly defined as behaving or engaging in dangerous behaviors where there is a high likelihood of harm to self, or the outright approval of killing oneself. This variable captures stories depicting Fundamentalists as being mentally unstable in such a way as to be liable to harm or kill themselves. The scale ranges from “not at all suicidal” to “very suicidal”.

Fundamentalists have often been involved in politics, and this involvement is captured by a variable ranging from “not at all politically involved” to “very politically involved”. Political involvement includes any action related to politics, such as lobbying, attempting to influence a vote, or supporting a particular candidate or Party. “Not at all involved” is refusing to vote or making statements about the futility of politics, whereas “a little politically involved” shows Fundamentalists staying in tune with political actions, keeping themselves informed, or preaching about politics. “Somewhat involved” shows active participation such as handing out voter pamphlets or joining political Parties, and “very involved” is lobbying congress, attempting to influence elections or Party platforms, or any hints of Fundamentalists desiring a theocracy.

Violence is desiring the destruction of material objects or of other people. “Very violent” means actions of violence were attempted or accomplished, whereas “somewhat violent” involves threats by Fundamentalists or insinuations that Fundamentalists are dangerous to society. “A little violent” is coded when Fundamentalists are shown as wishing violence or catastrophe upon others, without themselves actually planning the action. “Not at all violent” includes Fundamentalists being portrayed as peaceful or pacifists, willing to be greatly hurt before ever wishing to fight back. In the violence

variable, a distinction is made between whether the violence is portrayed as being provoked or unprovoked, with unprovoked violence receiving a score of two, provoked a one, and not mentioned a zero.

### **Section Five: Overall impressions**

In the fifth and final section of the code sheet, the overall impression of each news clip is evaluated. A subjective yet finely graduated impression is gleaned by employing a thermometer rating from 1 to 100, with fifty meaning the news story is neutral while above fifty signifies it is warm or hot and under fifty cool or cold toward Fundamentalists.

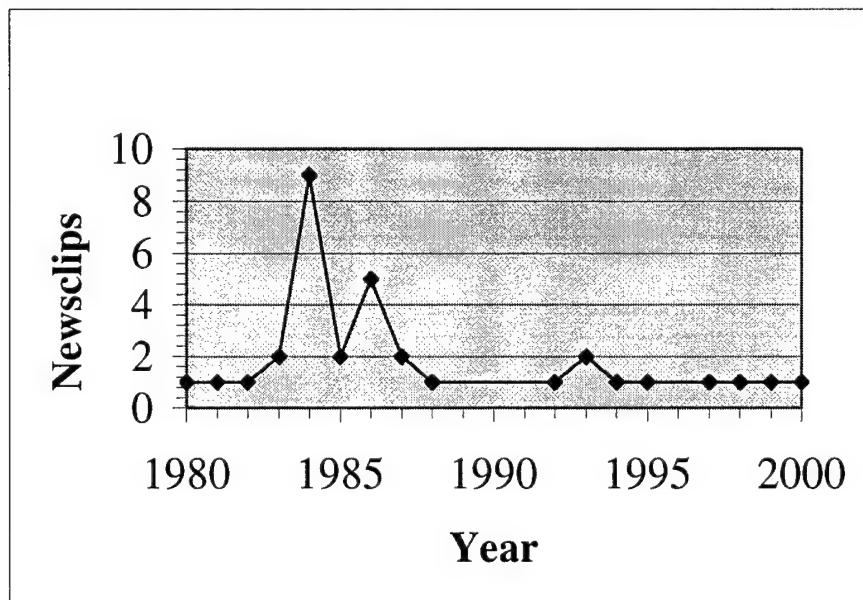
A rating scale identical to the Kerr and Moy (in press) scale measured the general focus of the news story. Instead of investigating the news value or other topics connected with Fundamentalists as are captured in section one, this rating assessed the overall subject of the news clip. Thus a story that truly focused on Fundamentalists would be a “religion” story, whereas if the Fundamentalists were more a side note or minor actor in a larger drama, some other category could be identified as the central theme of the news clip.

The last variable involves evaluating the overall impression left by the video, audio and mixed data. This information assists to show more precisely which elements are portraying Fundamentalists in which ways. The scales range from “very negatively” to “very positively,” and included a rating for “not portrayed”. If there is a large difference between the video and audio portrayal, it may be evidence of irony or satirical coverage. These distinctions were measured by first viewing the news clip with both video and audio, then listening to the video only, and finally turning off the sound and viewing the visuals alone.

It should be noted that many of the above variables were chosen because they mirror and thus may interact with past research, especially the Kerr and Moy (in press) investigation of print media’s portrayal of Fundamentalists. Selecting identical scales allows for better comparison between the current study and that past research.

### Chapter IV: Results

The number of news clips remained low throughout the period under investigation, with only two sharp rises detected in 1984 (n=9) and 1986 (n=5). The remainder of the clips were fairly evenly distributed, with no clips appearing in the years 1989, 1990, 1999, and 1996 (see Figure 1). Also of interest, all 33 news clips were broadcast on ABC (n=11), NBC (n=12) or CBS (n=10), even though The Vanderbilt Archives store FOX and CNN news casts.



**Figure 1.** News clips per year.

The time of broadcast ranged between 5:30 p.m. and 6:50 p.m. Over 24% of the news clips were aired in September, with October (12%) and January (12%) being the second most frequent months for broadcasts.

#### **Portrayals of Fundamentalist Christians**

Research question one asked how Fundamentalists are portrayed in nightly television news, including why Fundamentalists make the news, what features are emphasized, and what overall impression of Fundamentalism is portrayed.

Stories covering Fundamentalists most often involved the news value of conflict/violence (54.5%), followed by change (15.2%), novelty and human interest (each at 12.1%) and then consensus/conflict resolution and other (each at 3%). Of the topics

that often coincided with Fundamentalist Christians, politics/government was most frequent (36.4%), followed by education (27.3%), and then the remaining topics were each detected in less than 10% of the news clips. Similarly, a third of the news clips main focus was on politics, while 30.3% were about social issues. Human interest and a strictly religious focus each occurred in 18% of the clips.

The most often detected explicitly stated term was “right/conservative”(found in 13 broadcasts), whereas “religious group/organization” was detected in only five news clips, “majority” was detected in two, and “sect,” “minority,” and “extremists/radicals” once. There was no mention of “separatists” nor “cult”.

The results show some type of worship was shown in 42.4% of the broadcasts. In these broadcasts Fundamentalists’ worship was depicted as “a little animated” ( $M=2$ ,  $S.D.=1$ ,  $n=14$ ). Fundamentalists were seen speaking/preaching in 57.6% of the broadcasts, typically portrayed somewhere between calm and a little animated ( $M=1.84$ ,  $S.D.=0.91$ ,  $n=19$ ). In general, Fundamentalists were also shown as being a little upset ( $M=2$ ,  $S.D.=0.69$ ,  $n=28$ ) as was their opposition ( $M=1.94$   $S.D.$  0.92,  $n=27$ ).

Across the news clips, Fundamentalists were shown as being somewhat intolerant ( $M=1.86$ ,  $S.D.=0.57$ ), of fairly balanced sincerity ( $M=3.73$ ,  $S.D.=0.94$ ), having some false prophecy ( $M=2$ ,  $S.D.=0$ ), and fairly balanced as to their inclusion or exclusion from society ( $M=3.81$ ,  $S.D.=1.39$ ). News clips were fairly balanced on the journalists’ skepticism regarding Fundamentalists’ supernatural encounters ( $M=3.1$ ,  $S.D.=0.74$ ). Fundamentalists were more often portrayed as being a growing group in society ( $M=4.36$ ,  $S.D.=0.41$ ), of average (balanced) intelligence ( $M=3.39$ ,  $S.D.=1.36$ ), responsibility ( $M=2.72$ ,  $S.D.=0.97$ ), and proneness to criminal activity ( $M=2.32$ ,  $S.D.=1.06$ ). Fundamentalists were shown as somewhat patriotic ( $M=3.96$ ,  $S.D.=0.78$ ) (see Table 1).

On a four-point scale, Fundamentalists were portrayed as lying between “somewhat” and “a little” racist ( $M=2.83$ ,  $S.D.=1.04$ ), and somewhat forceful in imposing their views upon others ( $M=3.08$ ,  $S.D.=0.65$ ). Fundamentalists were portrayed as being politically involved ( $M=3.64$ ,  $S.D.=0.59$ ), and when violence was detected in a story the Fundamentalists were typically portrayed as “somewhat violent” ( $M=3$ ,

Table 1.

Television News Portrayals of Fundamentalists, 1980-2000

Variable	%	Mean	S.D.	N
Tolerance (1-5)		1.86	0.57	14
Sincerity (1-5)		3.73	0.94	22
False prophecy (1-5)		2	0	5
Exclusion (1-5)		3.81	1.39	8
Supernatural (1-5)		3.1	0.74	5
Declension (1-5)		4.36	0.41	14
Intelligence (1-5)		3.39	1.36	9
Responsibility (1-5)		2.72	0.97	9
Criminal Minded (1-5)		2.32	1.06	11
Patriotic (1-5)		3.96	0.78	12
Racism (1-4)		2.83	1.04	3
Forceful in imposing their views (1-4)		3.08	0.65	19
Politically involved (1-4)		3.64	0.59	18
Violence (1-4)		3.00	1.73	3
Unprovoked violence	50			2
Thermometer rating (0-100)		42.2	14	33
Video/audio together (1-5)		2.54	0.80	33
Audio Alone (1-5)		2.34	0.89	33
Visual alone (1-5)		2.98	0.71	31

Note: Possible ratings are specified in parenthesis: 1-5 scales are Likert-type items; 1-4 scales ranged from "not at all" to "very." "Deeds" and "Suicidal" were excluded from this table as only they were only detected once.

S.D.=1.73,  $n = 3$ ), with only one instance of violence being provoked. The categories of “deeds” and “suicidal” were only detected in one news clip each, in which deeds registered as “do some good deeds” and suicide rated “a little suicidal.”

The average thermometer rating given to fundamentalist Christians by news broadcasts fell on the “cool” side at 42.2 (S.D.=14). Also from a gestalt perspective, the video/audio together portrayed Fundamentalists somewhere just below neutral ( $M=2.54$ , S.D.=0.80), as did the audio alone ( $M=2.34$ , S.D.=0.89) and visual alone ( $M=2.98$ , S.D.=0.71).

### **Relationships in the Portrayal of Fundamentalists**

After dropping the “consensus/conflict resolution” and “other” news value categories, since they had less than two cases, analyses of variance indicated some relationships between news value and other variables. Specifically, news value was significantly related to the overall portrayal of Fundamentalists in the video ( $F=4.01$ ,  $p=.02$ ,  $n=29$ ), though not to the audio alone nor to the video/audio combined variable. A post hoc Scheffé test revealed the news clips having the news value of novelty were significantly more positively portrayed in the video than new values of change or conflict/violence.

Analyses of variance showed there was an association between the topic that was paired with Fundamentalists in a newscast and the portrayal of the Fundamentalists’ opposition as being upset ( $F=7.10$ ,  $p=.001$ ), the news clips’ thermometer rating ( $F=4.15$ ,  $p=.003$ ), and the overall impression left by the visual/audio combined ( $F=4.23$ ,  $p=.03$ ), audio alone ( $F=2.43$ ,  $p=.05$ ), and visual alone ( $F=4.76$ ,  $p=.002$ ). Dropping variables that occurred less than twice, Post hoc Scheffé tests revealed the opposition to Fundamentalists were shown as being more upset in topics involving politics than when newscasts involved the topics of military/guerilla/terrorism and religion alone.

As can be seen in Figure 2, negative thermometer readings typically resulted from covering topics such as military/terrorism ( $M=20.67$ , S.D.=18.48) and religion alone ( $M=29.5$ , S.D.=12.97). When the topic of the news clip was politics/government ( $M=42.92$ , S.D.=5.74), law/crime/courts ( $M=48.25$ , S.D.=1.06), or education ( $M=45.2$ ,



S.D.=12.49) more moderately negative thermometer ratings resulted. Topics such as business/labor/economics (M=67.5), and important people (M=69), though each with only a single newscast, resulted in higher thermometer ratings.

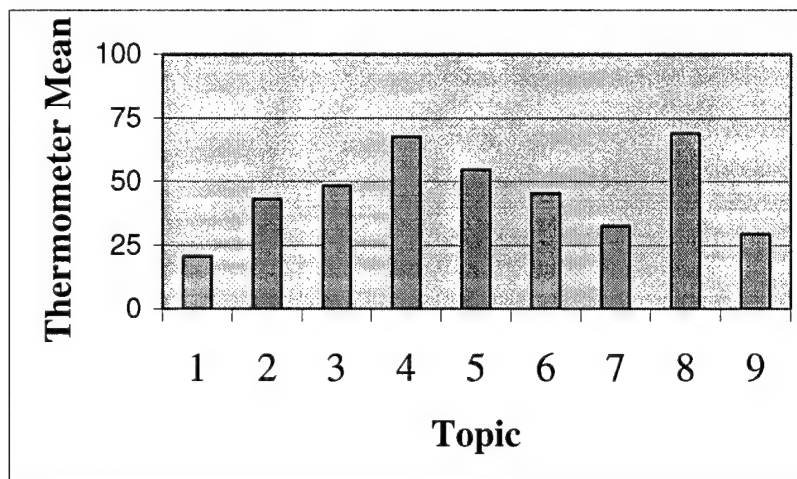


Figure 2. Thermometer means by topic. 1=Military/terrorism, 2=Politics/Government, 3=Law/Crime/Courts, 4=Business/Labor/Economics, 5=Culture/Entertainment, 6=Education, 7=Lifestyle/behavior, 8=Important People, 9=Religion alone.

Changes over time in thermometer means appeared to be sporadic. Though the two highest thermometer ratings occurred during presidential election years (1984 and 1988), other presidential years seemed about average (1980) or below average (2000).

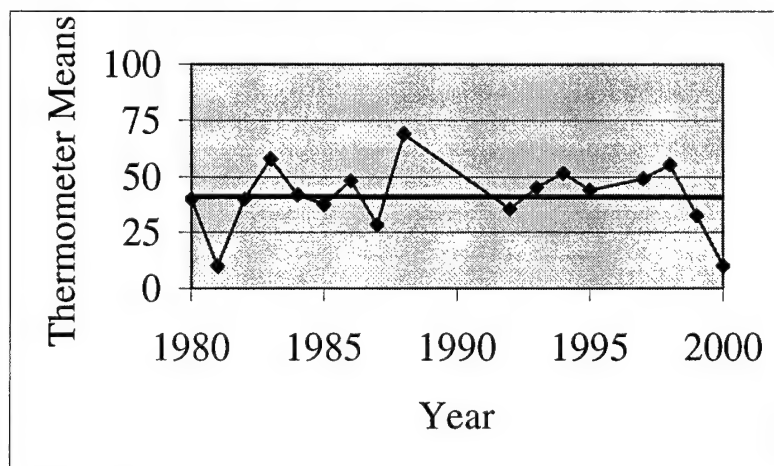


Figure 3. Thermometer means by year. Note: There are no data points for the years 1989, 1990, 1991, and 1996.

Some significant correlations also emerged from the data. Pearson's  $r$  tests revealed the portrayal of Fundamentalists' degree of excitement while speaking was correlated with the overall broadcasts' thermometer rating ( $r = -.606$ ,  $p = .003$ ,  $n = 19$ ), portrayal of worship ( $r = .683$ ,  $p = .01$ ,  $n = 11$ ), portrayal of declension ( $r = .772$ ,  $p = .003$ ,  $n = 11$ ), portrayal of responsibility ( $r = -.984$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $n = 5$ ), and portrayal of patriotism ( $r = .755$ ,  $p = .015$ ,  $n = 8$ ). Thermometer ratings were correlated with portrayal of declension in society ( $r = -.511$ ,  $p = .031$ ,  $n = 14$ ), ability to act responsibly ( $r = .666$ ,  $p = .025$ ,  $n = 9$ ), level of criminal mindedness ( $r = .866$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $n = 11$ ), extent of patriotism ( $r = .505$ ,  $p = .047$ ,  $n = 12$ ), and the portrayal of Fundamentalists' toleration ( $r = .521$ ,  $p = .028$ ,  $n = 14$ ). The portrayal of Fundamentalists' tolerance level was also correlated with the degree of imposition of values upon others ( $r = .809$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $n = 11$ ), and the extent to which Fundamentalists should be excluded from society ( $r = .84$ ,  $p = .037$ ,  $n = 5$ ).

### **Differences in Network Portrayals**

Research question two asked if there are any differences between the networks in portrayal of Fundamentalists. This question was explored using ANOVAs, revealing only one variable to have significant differences at the  $p = .05$  level. Differences in portrayal of patriotism was significant ( $p = .05$ ,  $F = 4.31$ ,  $n = 12$ ), and a post hoc Scheffé test showed NBC portrayed Fundamentalists as being significantly more patriotic than did CBS. ABC's portrayal of Fundamentalists' level of patriotism was rated between CBS and NBC, but not significantly different from either network.

### **Comparison Between Television and Print**

The final research question asked for a comparison between television coverage and print coverage. Independent T-tests run between the Kerr and Moy (in press) print data and the television data provided evidence that by and large the two media are similar in their portrayal of fundamentalist Christians. Cross-tabulation revealed no significant differences between the labels used to describe Fundamentalists. Two-tailed T-tests of means found differences between the newspaper and broadcast portrayals of Fundamentalists' intelligence ( $t = 2.25$ ,  $p = .03$ , broadcast  $n = 9$ ), sincerity ( $t = 3.81$ ,  $p = .001$ , broadcast  $n = 22$ ), patriotism ( $t = 4.53$ ,  $p = .001$ , broadcast  $n = 12$ ), and the political

involvement of Fundamentalists ( $t=2.50$ ,  $p=.02$ , broadcast  $n=18$ ). Specifically, television does not portray Fundamentalists quite as unintelligent and insincere as newspapers. Furthermore, television portrays Fundamentalists as a bit more patriotic, and a bit more politically involved.

## **Chapter V: Discussion**

The present research is firmly rooted in Fundamentalism's historic beliefs and background, as it specifically explores nightly network television portrayals of Fundamentalists. These data are also compared with data gleaned from U.S. newspaper coverage of Fundamentalists, in order to gain an understanding of how the media at large have portrayed Fundamentalists. The assumption is that the media's portrayal of religion can be better studied by understanding how specific religious groups are portrayed. Understanding media portrayal of many religious groups would allow comparisons between portrayals, and may produce a more nuanced understanding of how the media report religion.

The first thing that is striking about the present research data is the lack of newscasts mentioning Fundamentalists, with only 33 nightly news stories covering Fundamentalists over a twenty-year period. This lack of news coverage is in itself significant, supporting most of the previous research showing religion is under-represented by the television news media (Buddenbaum, 1990). Expanding the search terms to include "Moral Majority", "born again" and "Falwell" would have nearly quadrupled the news clips. However, these search terms were rejected as they are not synonymous with Christian "fundamentalist" and "fundamentalism." Furthermore, using identical search terms with the earlier Kerr and Moy (in press) study of newspapers allows for greater confidence when comparing the two data sets.

### **Research Questions Evaluated**

The first research question asked why Fundamentalists make the news, what specific features are highlighted, and what overall impression is given. The news value of conflict is clearly dominant, occurring in over half of the newscasts. These stories range in intensity from mentioning Fundamentalists as involved in racist paramilitary groups to questioning Fundamentalists' participation in the political process. Only a single news clip showed consensus/conflict resolution as the news value.

It is possible the news value is driven somewhat by the news topic of the clips, with over a third of the coverage involving politics/government (see Price et al., 1997, for

more information on the relationship between conflict news value and politics). Furthermore, the most-used explicit term detected was “right/conservative.” Politics seems to be the primary reason Fundamentalists make the news, and quite possibly, the reason news about them is often less than flattering. The frames used often deal with the conflict between church and state, questioning the validity of the Christian Right’s activities in politics and grappling with how an exclusivist religion should be treated in a pluralistic society.

The second most frequent topic coinciding with Fundamentalists is education (in 27.3% of the clips), and these stories also seemed to frequently involve conflict. These stories mostly discussed Fundamentalists contentions that creation be taught beside evolution as a theory, or pitted Fundamentalist pastors against government agencies in stories about regulating religious education.

Specific features that emerge from the data include that Fundamentalists are shown as being somewhat intolerant, somewhat imposing of their views upon others and somewhat violent when violence is shown (only in three news clips). They are also portrayed as being at least a little racist, somewhat patriotic and politically involved, and growing in numbers. These emergent features will be discussed in more depth later.

The overall impression of news clips is slightly negative, with the mean hovering just above 42 on the thermometer rating. This is further evidenced as the audio-visual combined, audio alone, and visual alone ratings all scored just below neutral portrayal. This slight negativity is also fairly stable over time, as can be seen by in Figure 3. The stable, slightly negative portrayal of Fundamentalists is consistent with the research involving print media (Kerr & Moy, in press).

### **Differences Between Networks**

The second research question explored differences and similarities between television networks. No real differences emerged between how the networks portrayed Fundamentalists, except NBC displayed Fundamentalists as being more patriotic than did CBS. ABC’s portrayal of Fundamentalists’ patriotism was between CBS’s and NBC’s. This is interesting as it is ABC that hired a religion reporter from 1994-2001 (Haynes,

2001). The addition seems to have made little difference in the content or frequency of coverage given Fundamentalists, though it may also be that the religion reporter's influence ensured ABC was more "balanced" on the portrayal of patriotism.

Admittedly the difference in portrayal of patriotism is puzzling. It is possible that these two networks differ as to what it means to be patriotic, with CBS possibly including toleration and pluralism into their definition whereas NBC is satisfied with flags and other sentiments of good intention. It is also possible that the small population size is the cause of this finding.

### **Comparing Television and Newspaper Portrayals**

One clear comparison that emerges is that the print media devoted many more resources (over 7,000 in the same time period) to covering Fundamentalists than the nightly news stations (33 news clips). This overwhelming volume difference suggests print media may have had a greater role than television in shaping the U.S. public's view of Fundamentalists, though it should be realized that all 33 national television news clips were probably seen by more people than any one of the newspaper articles.

One factor contributing to the overwhelming volume difference may be that there simply are many more newspapers than network stations in the United States. A single significant story can therefore be picked up by many different newspapers, and often newspapers will print a story with only minor changes for localization. A second factor may be that many more stories about Fundamentalists are possible on the local or regional levels that would not warrant national attention.

Overall there is little discernable difference between the media in how Fundamentalists are portrayed. Both television news and newspapers averaged about 42 on the overall thermometer rating, meaning both media are cool but not outright cold when portraying Fundamentalists. While the television media seem to have a more narrow definition of what a Fundamentalist is, both media seem to use the word interchangeably with any conservative Christian in politics or with anyone having an "extreme" religious belief. Journalistic norms of objectivity, evaluating news value, and balancing stories may be the main cause of the similarities.

The differences that are discovered between television and newspaper portrayal of Fundamentalist Christians are in the areas of intelligence, sincerity, patriotism, and political involvement. The data suggest television is not as prone as print media to denigrate Fundamentalists' intelligence or sincerity. This may be explained by understanding the media at work. Writers must assess the credibility of their subjects, and somehow convey that credibility to the reader. This is seldom accomplished blatantly, but the writer will often hide the evaluation in ways like using "claimed" instead of someone "said." This gives the impression of less sincerity. Television, on the other hand, can rely simply upon showing the subject, and allow the audience to decide for themselves how sincere a comment is—allowing each picture to be worth a thousand words.

A similar mechanism may be at work when portraying Fundamentalists' intelligence. Instead of allowing the person's own words and actions to speak for their intelligence, the writer must explain who the subject is, often giving background information on schooling or listing the subject's credentials for commenting on a certain topic. Finally, it may also be that print journalism still has the stronger ties to muckraking, and to past journalists such as Henry L. Mencken, and so is more hostile in criticizing areas of sincerity and intelligence.

Television's portrayal of Fundamentalists as being more patriotic and politically involved may be the simple addition of visuals. Fundamentalist churches often have both the Christian and the U.S. flag on the stage, and Fundamentalists seem to exude a sort of traditional American small town aura that may not be captured in print alone. Furthermore, a print story of a political party speech or convention typically sounds like politics as usual, but there may be an added emotive patriotic quality to seeing these events, and this may be reflected in portrayal of Fundamentalists.

A further note needs to be made on the comparison of these two media. While the television news data included strictly news items, the print data also include items that have more entertainment value, such as letters to the editor. Of the print articles, these

letters to the editor were the most negative toward Fundamentalists (Kerr & Moy, in press).

### **Emergent Features in Portrayals of Fundamentalists**

The prevalence of politics seems to be the overwhelming emergent feature of news broadcasts mentioning Fundamentalists. Coverage of Fundamentalists often includes interactions with political parties (typically the Republican Party) and speculation as to the influence Fundamentalists have upon the President of the United States (typically President Reagan). Related variables also emerge as significant, with Fundamentalists shown as being somewhat patriotic but also wanting to impose their views upon others (more often than not through political coercion).

These findings are somewhat illuminated by polls of the American people attempting to understand their views of mixing religion and politics. Though Americans affirm the separation of church and state, poll after poll shows they do not believe in the separation of religion and politics (Kohut et al, 2000). Voters prefer a politician to have a religious faith, but not to parade the faith around too much in public (Shlaes, 2001). This also seems sensible as the institutions of church and state must remain separate for either to perform its functions properly for society, but religion and politics are both processes of thought and action, which impinge on one another, both attempting to specify and enforce values upon society.

The debate concerning the role of secular power in enforcing Christian morals goes back at least to Constantine, who in 312 A.D. issued the Edict of Milan making Christianity legal, setting the stage for Christian orthodox beliefs to eventually become required in order to hold public office (Nilsson, 1967). In fact, Rome was the most important experiment in religious pluralism before America, but their version of religious pluralism was nonexclusive (Silk, 1988). As Rome found, Christianity is a particularly tricky religion to balance with a pluralistic state, with its strict monotheistic beliefs and the notion of God Himself being jealous, not tolerating other gods (Exodus 20:5, New International Version). For a Fundamentalist, as with the early Christians, to tolerate other beliefs is to tolerate error, and perhaps even to tolerate evil. Just as the triumph of



Christianity naturally imposed its exclusivism on the Roman state, bringing Roman religious pluralism to an end, so too in America's past Christianity naturally repressed religious pluralism (beyond the bounds of Christianity). It is the contemporary story of this contention that is being played out in nightly television news.

The church versus state debate is prevalent in the data, driving the high frequency of stories either focusing on politics or having politics/government as an important side theme. Coverage often evaluates the proper place of religion (specifically the Christian Right) in politics. A 1984 news clip involved a Republican Congressman who said he would vote Democratic simply because Ronald Reagan was too involved with the Christian Right. Another clip discussed the Christian Right's role in forming the 1992 Republican platform, asking if its moral influence would alienate voters. In a sense, the media seem to be fulfilling their "watchdog" role by defending the establishment clause and the freedom of religion clause, both of which happen to be in the same amendment expounding the freedom of the press. Often this defense involves moving beyond the stated principle of freedom of religion to include the freedom to a lack of religion (secularism), with all the more specialized laws and mores such a position must entail. "The commitment to secularism and modernism runs so strongly in the western media that any concept which smacks of theocracy or an intrusion upon press freedoms arouse instant hostility" (Underwood, in press, p. 175). While the present study only shows mild "hostility," nevertheless some antipathy is evident.

The issue of toleration also emerges from the data, which shows Fundamentalists as being more than a little racist and somewhat intolerant. The more television news portrayed Fundamentalists as intolerant, the more Fundamentalists were also portrayed as deserving exclusion (instead of inclusion) from society. This may be due to the need for a pluralistic society to champion religious tolerance and diversity, or else face civil war or at least internal strife. The media in a secular state also have much at stake, as a perusal of more theocratic nations reveals many more restrictions upon press freedoms. The need to protect the notion of tolerance is heightened when the religious group has a large following and is prominently featured as attempting to influence politics.

While this positive correlation between portrayals of tolerance and inclusion in society is understandable, it certainly raises some interesting religious issues. Religion can come under fire when toleration is the standard used to evaluate whether a group should be excluded or included in society. The danger is that the media will in effect be portraying religious piety, conviction, and zeal as extremism, and will thus be enforcing the value that all religious views are tolerable unless the religious view is strongly held. Though a lack of religious conviction may seem best suited for a pluralistic democracy, the general principle of toleration must even extend to Fundamentalists who are viewed as being less tolerant. The data suggest that indeed is somewhat occurring, with news clips' overall impressions only being slightly negative.

The finding that Fundamentalism is portrayed as growing is interesting, as the number of proper Fundamentalists may be remaining stagnant or declining. "While the media have sometimes portrayed America as a nation overrun with growing legions of born-again, the data suggest that the size of the born-again community remains amazingly stable—in spite of enormous evangelistic spending and effort" (Barna, 1996, p. 74). One estimate puts the spending of U.S. churches on ministries since 1980 at \$530 billion (Barna, 1996). Born again Christians have remained at just above a third of the U.S. population (see Figure 3 above), but the number of people adhering to a strict literal interpretation of the Bible (as Fundamentalists do) is declining (Gallup, 2002). Perhaps the media have overstated the growth of Fundamentalists as a tool to raise newsworthiness.

### **Today's Cultural Glue**

The potential competition between religion and the media deserves some consideration. It used to be that religion was the "glue" that bound a society together, creating common values, culture and identity. In America, Christianity molded the language and thus communication, with Biblical metaphors, imagery and partial quotations abounding. The Bible was often the primary textbook in schools (Barton, 1992). One historian performed a ten year study of 15,000 colonial documents and found the Bible was the most quoted text (34%), followed by the works of Charles-Louis de

Secondat Montesquieu (8.3%), Sir William Blackstone (7.9%) and John Locke (2.9%) (Lutz, 1988).

From its inception, Christianity has persisted in defining the culture it is in, while simultaneously being defined by that culture (Niebuhr, 1951). Arguably, today it is the media that acts as the common cultural “glue” in Western society. The mass media have superceded religion as the chief cultural forming agent (or at least as the most time-consuming activity after work and sleep), and may have the capability of sparking war between nations and impacting thought throughout the world (Davis, 1994; Entman, 2000; Nacos, Shapiro, Hritzuk, & Chadwick, 2000). Television does not merely entertain or inform, but it even tells stories that provide national identity, personal self-images, and especially a kind of public faith. Like religion before it, television gives Americans their language, and shows them what values are acceptable or unacceptable (Gerbner, 1997). Television not only competes for time with religion, but also competes to define morals and to define what it means to be human—or in religious terms, the competition is for the hearts and souls of Americans.

### **Are Broadcasters covering Fundamentalists with a Bias?**

The present study only analyzes television coverage of Fundamentalists at its best. That is to say, it only looks at network news coverage, which in theory intends to present topics in an objective and unbiased manner. Research shows that television news is especially influenced by market forces and journalistic norms, tending to dampen strong ideological biases (Ansolabehere et al., 1993).

This study raises the issue of journalistic conscience and objectivity, as network television news has not portrayed fundamentalist Christians neutrally. Specifically, television highlights political activity while portraying Fundamentalists as being somewhat intolerant and forceful in imposing their views upon others. Thermometer data also suggest a slightly negative undertone is prevalent in stories about Fundamentalists. It should be noted that the goal of objectivity is not to have every topic covered in a value-free or averaging-to-neutral fashion (Cohen & Elliot, 1997). Such an ethic would not only be incongruous with reality, but would also make very bland news. Still,

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**Appendix 1. Content Analysis: Television Coverage of Fundamentalist Christians**Case Number \_\_\_\_\_ **Coder Initials** \_\_\_\_\_

Network Affiliation: ABC NBC CBS FOX CNN Other \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ (MM/DD/YY) Time \_\_\_\_\_ PM / AM

**1. News Value:**

- 1 Novelty  
 2 Change  
 3 Conflict/Violence  
 4 Consensus/conflict resolution  
 5 Human Interest  
 6 Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Topic (Fundamentalist Christians and):**

- 1 Military/Guerilla/Terrorism  
 2 Politics/Government  
 3 Law/Crime/Courts  
 4 Business/Labor/Economics  
 5 Culture/Entertainment  
 6 Science/Medicine  
 7 Education  
 8 Media  
 9 Social Services  
 10 Lifestyle/behavior  
 11 Important people  
 12 Religion

**2. AUDIO: How is this group explicitly referred to in this news clip? Check all that apply.**

- |                              |       |                     |       |
|------------------------------|-------|---------------------|-------|
| Cult                         | _____ | Minority            | _____ |
| Sect                         | _____ | Majority            | _____ |
| Religious group/organization | _____ | Right/conservative  | _____ |
| Separatists (from society)   | _____ | Extremists/radicals | _____ |

**3. VISUAL: For each dimension below, mark which best reflects the visuals shown in the news clip.**

- |   |                               |                                      |                                  |                            |                 |
|---|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------|
| a | Calm worship                  | A little animated worship            | Somewhat animated worship        | Excited worship            | DID NOT DISPLAY |
| b | Calm speaking/preaching       | A little animated speaking/preaching | Somewhat animated speaking/prchg | Excited speaking/preaching | DID NOT DISPLAY |
| c | Fundamentalists portrayed as: | Not at all upset                     | A little upset                   | Somewhat upset             | Very upset      |
| d | Opposition portrayed as:      | Not at all upset                     | A little upset                   | Somewhat upset             | Very upset      |

**4. GESTALT: For each dimension noted below, mark the answer that best reflects how this news clip portrayed Fundamentalist Christians.**

- |   |                                |                                    |          |                                    |                                |                 |
|---|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------|
| . | Very intolerant                | Somewhat intolerant                | Balanced | Somewhat tolerant                  | Very tolerant                  | DID NOT MENTION |
| B | Very insincere                 | Somewhat insincere                 | Balanced | Somewhat sincere                   | Very sincere                   | DID NOT MENTION |
| C | Never do good deeds            | Do few good deeds                  | Balanced | Do some good deeds                 | Do many good deeds             | DID NOT MENTION |
| D | Very falsely prophetic         | Some false prophecy                | Balanced | Little false prophecy              | No false prophecy              | DID NOT MENTION |
| E | Should be excluded entirely    | Should be excluded more            | Balanced | Should be more included            | Part of US identity            | DID NOT MENTION |
| F | Very skeptical of supernatural | A little skeptical of supernatural | Balanced | Somewhat accepting of supernatural | Very accepting of supernatural | DID NOT MENTION |

	Very much declension	Some declension	Balanced	Some growth	Much growth	DID NOT MENTION
H	Very unintellig.	Somewhat unintellig.	Balanced	Somewhat intellig.	Very intellig.	DID NOT MENTION
	Very irresponsible	Somewhat irresponsible	Balanced	Somewhat responsible	Very responsible	DID NOT MENTION
	Very criminal-minded	Somewhat criminal-minded	Balanced	Somewhat law-abiding	Very law-abiding	DID NOT MENTION
	Very unpatriotic	Somewhat unpatriotic	Balanced	Somewhat patriotic	Very patriotic	DID NOT MENTION
L	Not at all racist	A little Racist	Somewhat racist	Very racist		DID NOT MENTION
	Not at all forcing their views on others	A little forceful in imposing their views on others	Somewhat forceful in imposing views	Very forceful in imposing views		DID NOT MENTION
N	Not at all suicidal	A little Suicidal	Somewhat suicidal	Very suicidal		DID NOT MENTION
	Not at all politically involved	A little politically involved	Somewhat politically involved	Very politically involved		DID NOT MENTION
P	Not at all violent	A little Violent	Somewhat violent	Very violent		DID NOT MENTION

Q. If "a little" to "very" violent, was this violence portrayed as:  
 \_\_\_\_\_ provoked OR \_\_\_\_\_ unprovoked?

**5. OVERALL IMPRESSION: I. Overall, how does the news clip "feel" toward Christian Fundamentalists?** Use a scale from 0 to 100, where 0 means "extremely unfavorably/negatively" and 100 means "extremely favorably/positively." \_\_\_\_\_

**II. What is the general focus of this news clip?**

1 Economic    2 Social    3 Political    4 Human interest    5 Religious    6 Other

**III. Overall, how are Fundamentalist Christians portrayed:**

**A. Video/audio together**

- 1 Very negatively
- 2 Somewhat negatively
- 3 Balanced/Neutrally
- 4 Somewhat positively
- 5 Very positively
- 6 Not portrayed

**B. In the audio**

- 1 Very negatively
- 2 Somewhat negatively
- 3 Balanced/Neutrally
- 4 Somewhat positively
- 5 Very positively
- 6 Not portrayed

**C. In the video**

- 1 Very negatively
- 2 Somewhat negatively
- 3 Balanced/Neutrally
- 4 Somewhat positively
- 5 Very positively
- 6 Not portrayed

## **Appendix 2. Code Book**

**Case Number:** The number assigned to each video clip in sequential order, beginning with the first video clip on the Vanderbilt tape.

Coder Initials: Peter Kerr is coder one, Erica Siegl is coder two.

**Date and Time:** Self explanatory. Assumed to be PM unless AM is circled.

### **Section 1: News Values & Topics**

**Novelty:** The primary purpose of the story has to do with an innovation or novelty topic. Examples include a story focused on a religious group's contributing time, money or resources to charities. Also could be Fundamentalists having a novel creed or performing novel religious ceremony/actions/initiatives. If in doubt between novelty and change, think of novelty as the "strange" or "unusual," whereas change may be more an incident that is different but that may eventually become routine as the change takes effect (more broad-reaching ramifications).

**Change:** The primary purpose of the broadcast is to address and describe a change of some sort within the religious group or about them. Examples include a change in their doctrinal stance that has repercussions or how the Fundamentalists are changing with modernization. Stories focusing on lack of change that do not fit better into other categories should be considered novelty.

**Conflict/Violence:** The primary focus is upon conflict or violence. Examples include focusing on protests, numerous scenes of shouting, or clear political/legislative coercion. Look for repeated scenes of damage to physical properties or persons, including destroyed abortion clinics or someone who was physically abused.

**Consensus/conflict resolution:** Stories that focus on groups or individuals reuniting or overcoming theological conflicts. This includes religious reunions as well as attempts to reconcile political or individual differences.

**Human Interest:** The primary focus is on an individual's story, typically with a feature perspective. Also includes focus on "heart warming" stories with a personal feel.

### **Topics:**

**Military/Guerilla/Terrorism:** Involves some type of organized group that aims at perpetrating violence, or is willing to use using force or threats to get their way.

Examples include KKK or the “free men” in Montana fighting with weapons to get their way.

**Politics/government:** Stories involve political candidates or bills/actions. May include political rallies, conventions, or focusing on political stances and statements. Law-abiding protests would be in this category.

**Law/crime/courts:** Involves interaction with legal apparatus, typically showing court buildings or lawyers. May be Fundamentalists convicted of crime if focus is on the crime. Includes actions of Supreme Court or other judicial bodies, or illegal violence such as destruction of abortion clinics.

**Business/Labor/Economics:** Story shows interaction with businesses, stock market, banks or other economic or fiscal institution. Also may include labor or union disputes that focus on the people or economic ramifications over the legalities or politics of an issue. Boycotts typically will fit into this category.

**Culture/Entertainment:** Story shows Fundamentalists as participants or separationists from cultural events such as holidays (especially Halloween or Christmas). May involve interaction with entertainment industry, such as Christian music or the entertainment value of religious broadcasts.

**Science/medicine:** Story emphasizes medical, scientific or technological aspects. Examples may include the fight with evolution (on a philosophical/scientific level, otherwise may be better in education category), abortion or contraceptive medications/procedures, especially when the focus is on the technical medical aspects (viability of fetus etc). May also involve modernization issues, or people refusing to take medication for religious reasons.

**Education:** Any argument about the practices in schools or what should or should not be taught in schools. Typical example may be the desire to use science books acknowledging/stressing evolution is only a theory, and proposing creation also is

included as a theory. Another area may be health education and contraceptive availability in schools.

**Media:** Involves emphasis on interaction with any form of media, or journalists or broadcasters. May be Fundamentalists claim media holds a bias against them, or a report on how many Fundamentalists use media or produce media in any form.

**Social Services:** Anything pertaining to a service offered by society. This may include childcare, but not if school (education) is involved.

**Lifestyle/behavior:** Anything involving individual choices about how to live or act both in private or in public. This includes areas such as sexual preference or abstaining from/tolerating certain actions. Differentiate this from culture by asking if the subject involves an American cultural norm or is it a personal level decision/action.

**Important People:** If the story stresses important people such as evangelists, business leaders or entertainers (focusing on personality of individual, otherwise code as business or entertainment). Does not include politicians (code such as politics) or judges (court).

**Religion:** Use if the focus is purely upon religion, possibly involving interaction with other religious groups, or discussing religious doctrine or policy that does not impact other categories.

## Section 2: Audio

**Audio explicit referral definitions:** Code if exact word is used, or variations of the word (words like cultish and sectarian should be coded). Code also if very close synonyms are used, such as religious “society” instead of “group.” Record “far right” as both right/conservative and extremist/radicals. Do NOT code the title “moral majority” as “majority.”

## Section 3: Video

**Worship:** Define generally as when a gathering of people look like they constitute a “congregation”, whether within or outside a church. Calm worship would be straight-faced listening or singing. A little animated involves some facial expressions of attention or concern over the topic/music. Somewhat animated involves some hands raised to God, or swaying in the aisles, or a few sporadic “amens,” whereas excited worship

involves clapping or waving hands in air, swaying of bodies, numerous shouts of “amen,” possibly speaking in spiritual “tongues” and having a generally excited atmosphere.

**Speaking/Preaching:** Code only the person who is speaking or preaching to a congregation, not individual dialogues or interviews. Calm preaching is little tone inflection and few or no hand movements/facial expressions. A little animated involves facial expressions and possibly some hand movement or tone inflection. Somewhat animated involves facial expressions, some hand movements and tone inflection, whereas excited involves these characteristics in an energetic manner, with the possibly shouting and waving hands, and also possibly including “pacing” or other body motions.

**Fundamentalists portrayed as:** This category captures how the Fundamentalists in general are visually portrayed. This measurement will help to determine if Fundamentalists are portrayed as much more aggravated than their opponents, or if the debate is equally heated on both sides. “Not at all upset” is calm speaking, rational dialogue, with little animation. “A little upset” is a change in voice tone, or facial expressions showing more marked emotion. “Somewhat upset” has definite tonal characteristics expressing heightened emotion, possibly less rational dialogue, and either aggressive or defensive body movements. “Very upset” involves shouting or chanting, typically a lot of emotion in voices, and hand waving and/or other aggressive actions.

**Opposition to Fundamentalists portrayed as:** This category captures how the Fundamentalists’ opponent group (the side that “balances “ the story) is generally visually portrayed. “Not at all upset” is calm speaking, rational dialogue, with little animation. “A little upset” is a change in voice tone, or facial expressions showing more marked emotion. “Somewhat upset” has definite tonal characteristics expressing heightened emotion, possibly less rational dialogue, and either aggressive or defensive body movements. “Very upset” involves shouting or chanting, typically a lot of emotion in voices, and hand waving and/or other aggressive actions.

#### **Section 4: Gestalt**

**Toleration:** Look for Fundamentalist Christians being portrayed as able to sympathize (or not) with the existence of beliefs contrary to their own. “Very intolerant” is being



closed-minded, condemning and/or disrespectful toward others' views while "very tolerant" is still holding a differing view, but being open minded/non-condemning and/or respectful toward the opposing viewpoint/person/group. The tolerance scale is not measuring the level of *disagreement* with other viewpoints, but the *inability to accept* such differences in a respectful/rational manner (including the inability to "agree to disagree"). Examples include: "Very tolerant" would be a Fundamentalist having a calm and rational dialogue with someone of a differing view, while being careful to understand and respect the other person. "Somewhat intolerant" may be a Fundamentalist showing some disrespect by cutting in while the other is speaking, or making disdainful facial expressions. "Somewhat intolerant" may be seen by a "snort" of disgust, or mild name-calling. More abusive name-calling, any physical attack or mean-spirited behavior toward an opposing person or viewpoint should be considered "very intolerant."

**Sincerity:** Measures if the group is portrayed as being trustworthy, dependable or reliable. "Very insincere" is if the group is called hypocritical or their actions are clearly marked as hypocritical. "Somewhat insincere" is when there are shades of hypocrisy, possibly showing Fundamentalists as being deceptive or hollow/false. "Somewhat sincere" shows Fundamentalists being true to their word and creed, but may also hint at insincerity in smaller areas. "Very sincere" shows not only Fundamentalists being true to their word/creed, but also having a resolve to endure hardships rather than give up or infringe upon those beliefs. Keep in mind this is not a rating of the goodness of their beliefs, but how they are portrayed as adhering to their beliefs.

**Good Deeds:** "Good deeds" include anything from helping the poor to missionary work teaching people to read and giving out medicine. Though the scale uses quantity terms (some/many), it also involves the quality of the good deed performed (so while donating 10 million dollars is just one act, it is considered a very good act and thus is coded as "do many good deeds"). "Never do good deeds" actually in some way shows or states the Fundamentalists lack concern for the needy, while "do few good deeds" admits they do some actions and have some concern, but show such to be woefully insufficient or without a generous heart. "Do some good deeds" denotes that the story shows

Fundamentalists helping the needy in some minor way, or shows them doing very good deeds but “balances” the story with areas in which they are lacking. “Do many good deeds” shows Fundamentalists as being generous and genuinely concerned for the needy. The magnitude of the good deed is measured proportionally to the giver (a wealthy person donating \$1000 may be just “some good deeds” whereas a child donating \$1000 earned through much toil could be considered “many good deeds”).

**Prophecy:** As defined by Silk (1995), this category addresses more than mere incorrect predictions of future events. It also involves propagating blatantly false doctrine; often for the religious leader's own financial gain. This idea is linked with “brain washing” or coercing adherents to give more to the religious group than an average American would deem reasonable. The “very falsely prophetic” would include people like suicide cults and Scientology’s founder L. Ron Hubbard who referred to potential converts as “raw meat” (Silk, 1995, p. 97). It may also involve wild predictions about the end of the world. “Some false prophecy” means there are hints of this type of abuse, but nothing blatant or criminal. Typically “some” will be stating their own beliefs, whereas “very” involves trying to convince other groups of their prophetic legitimacy. “Little false prophecy” is on the positive side of the scale, for stories that state directly this group is “sound” or “orthodox” in their beliefs and does not prey on people. “No false prophecy” would be a story that shows or states Fundamentalists are trustworthy in their financial dealings, or very stable in that they do not offer false predictions/reject prophetic utterances as fanciful (this may be in reference to the millennium, stating they refuse to be “date setters” as to when the world ends etc.). If the newscast depicts Fundamentalists discussing a potential Y2K disaster, but themselves not giving full credibility to the notion, the story may be balanced.

**Inclusion:** This variable measures the strength of feeling that Fundamentalists should be included and accepted as a part of the American system and national identity. “Should be excluded entirely” is the sentiment that Fundamentalism is not a valid lifestyle choice for “real” Americans, and may involve the explicit or implicit suggestion that this group should go to another country or loose their citizenship. “Should be excluded more”

involves a portrayal that suggests Fundamentalism is too prevalent in American society, and that it ought to be in some way relegated to a less influential or noticeable position. This could be a statement saying Fundamentalism enjoys too much recognition or legitimacy than it deserves in American society. “Should be more included” would be a statement saying Fundamentalism should be recognized to a greater extent as part of American culture or history, whereas “part of U.S. identity” involves a recognition that the country was “founded” on Fundamentalist values or that Fundamentalism is as American “as apple pie.”

**Supernatural:** This variable is focused on how the journalist portrays Fundamentalists rather than on how Fundamentalists themselves behave. Supernatural is anything that seems to be outside normal natural laws, such as prophecy, healings, the effectiveness of prayer, dealings in the spirit world and possibly even talking to or hearing God. Thus “very skeptical of supernatural” would be a broadcast that belittles the Fundamentalists’ position on the supernatural, or directly claims it to be “unscientific” or “irrational.” “A little skeptical” involves the newscast hinting at the unlikelihood of the supernatural occurrence without directly opposing it, or being directly skeptical but also somewhat “balancing” the story by showing the widespread belief or the plausibility of the occurrence. If the story shows both skepticism and a recognition of the validity of “faith,” the story is “balanced.” “Somewhat accepting” involves the story being weighted toward believing the supernatural, or allowing the Fundamentalists to speak for themselves without interjecting a skeptical angle. “Very accepting” would be a newscast that actually shows the results or evidence that the supernatural occurred, and then either confirms it as supernatural or simply confirms the incident happened and there is no other explanation available than the supernatural claims of the Fundamentalists. Also note that these categories are valid not only for actions or occurrences, but also for reporting simply on the belief that something could happen. Finally, any journalistic speculation in a story about the supernatural in faiths or groups other than Fundamentalists is not to be considered part of this variable, as it is dedicated to journalists’ portrayal of Fundamentalists’ beliefs.

**Declension:** Declension involves speculation as to the decline of religion or religious influence in society. If the media refer to Fundamentalists as “outdated” or “dwindling in numbers” that would mean there is “very much declension.” “Some declension” is when these ideas are alluded to without directly asserting them, or if there is the statement that they are loosing ground in America but the newscast also shows some evidence of renewal or revival as well. “Some declension” may also involve statements about Fundamentalists viewpoints being outdated, or their policies being rejected, or their moral standards as no longer being relevant. “Some growth” would be a reference to Fundamentalism’s growth or “spreading,” whereas statements about having increasing political clout or influence in society as well as statements about rapid growth or spreading should be coded as “much growth.”

**Intelligence:** This variable refers to how the media portrays Fundamentalists intellectual abilities or capabilities. “Very unintelligent” may be explicitly stated or implied by citing low education levels, derogatory labels (backwards/backwater), or highlighting irrational behaviors. “Somewhat unintelligent” would be a milder form of the above, or possibly suggested when stating theories contrary to Fundamentalist theories as fact, or when ridiculing Fundamentalist viewpoints. “Somewhat intelligent” shows Fundamentalists as rational, knowledgeable, or credible, whereas “very intelligent” more directly compliments their intellectual achievements or capabilities. Consider sarcasm when coding, and do not code as “unintelligent” based on mention of a dogma, but on the media’s portrayal of that dogma (thus, the fact that they do not believe in evolution does not impact this rating, unless the newscast hints that such a belief is untrue/not rational etc.).

**Irresponsible:** Involves portrayals that Fundamentalist are unable to handle their obligations and own up to their opinions and actions. “Very irresponsible” may involve accusations of blame shifting, child negligence, or neglect to seek needed medical attention. “Somewhat irresponsible” may be portrayals of Fundamentalist as being lazy in community affairs, or unwilling to perform tasks necessary for society. “Somewhat responsible” involves portrayal of Fundamentalists owning up to their positions and the

consequences of them, implicitly showing them to be trustworthy. “Very responsible” is when the story explicitly portrays Fundamentalists as being trustworthy, conscientious, dependable, sensible, or mature.

**Criminal Minded:** Involves the desire to break or bend the laws. “Very criminal minded” portrays Fundamentalists breaking laws or actively seeking to bend them or shirk their legal obligations. This may be a refusal to go to court or comply with court orders, or even perpetrating criminal activity such as murdering a doctor who performs abortions and justifying the act with their religion. “Somewhat criminal minded” shows Fundamentalists as being more apt to break laws than other groups, or more willing to accept a lower view of a legal ruling. This may involve a statement that Fundamentalists more frequently violate a specific law or guideline. “Somewhat law abiding” shows Fundamentalists as following the laws and upholding legal standards, whereas “very law abiding” shows Fundamentalists adhering to a strict definition of the law, possibly at their detriment, and doing so to a greater extent than would be expected of a normal citizen.

**Patriotism:** This variable measures the degree to which the media portray Fundamentalists as being proud of their country and what it stands for as well as supporters of the democratic system and the U.S. constitution. Suggestions that they are against the government, or against taxes etc. may be coded “very unpatriotic” (though evading taxes may be coded under “law-abiding/criminal-minded” if the news clip specifically mentions breaking the law). “Somewhat unpatriotic” may be hints or suggestions that they do not appreciate America or its government, possibly making derogatory statements about the President or constitution. This may also be refusing to give the pledge of allegiance or show reverence to the U.S. flag or national anthem. “Somewhat patriotic” may be portrayal of Fundamentalists as being proud of the country and what it stands for, supporters of the democratic system and the U.S. constitution. “Very patriotic” may be scenes of Fundamentalists pledging allegiance or singing the national anthem, or taking a stand for the democratic system. The difference between patriotism and inclusion is that patriotism involves Fundamentalists’ willingness to

associate with the U.S., whereas inclusion is capturing how *others* see Fundamentalists being associated with the U.S.

**Racist:** Belittling others due to their cultural or ethnic background. “Very racist” would be references to associations with Nazis or skinheads or the Ku Klux Klan. Explicit statements from Fundamentalists that derogate other races would also be very racist. “Somewhat racist” may be things like pointing out the Bob Jones University policy of not allowing different ethnical backgrounds as defined by skin color to date each other. If the story focuses on this topic and the injustice behind it without explaining the background of the rule or letting Fundamentalists explain their side of the story it would be “very racist.” “A little racist” may involve Fundamentalists hinting at racist tendencies, possibly not explicitly stating it is racism, but highlighting racist tendencies or Fundamentalists neglecting to herald the cause of integration. “Not at all racists” would be showing Fundamentalist as being very comfortable with the integration of races, possibly showing their attempts at uniting the races, trying to mend past harms or trying to diversify church congregations.

**Forcing views on others:** This does not involve proselytizing, but instead detects the imposition of views upon others by means of physical or statutory force. “Not at all forceful” means Fundamentalists are portrayed as having their own differing viewpoints but refuse to place those standards or values where they will impact others who hold different ideas. “A little forceful” may involve some peer pressure to conform to Fundamentalist standards, but no actual coercion. “Somewhat forceful” would be manipulating circumstances such a way that it is very socially undesirable to have conflicting views. This may be heavy peer pressure to participate in Christmas or Easter functions, or to dress in a certain modest way. “Very forceful” would be enacting laws or using physical coercion to implement Fundamentalist policies. Examples include enforcing a law not to work on Sunday upon a Jew, or removing evolution from school text books/banning certain books from libraries.

**Suicidal:** Prone to behave or engage in dangerous behaviors where there is a high likelihood of harm to self. “Very suicidal” includes attempts or even successes of

suicide. “Somewhat suicidal” is describing Fundamentalist as mentally unstable and capable/desirous of harming themselves. “A little suicidal” may be just hinting at past suicide cases when mentioning Fundamentalist, or showing Fundamentalists talking fondly about death without fully discussing the religious context of the statements. “Not at all suicidal” mentions suicide and then differentiates Fundamentalists from those that are suicidal. The story may also discuss the Fundamentalists’ position that suicide is a sin, and a selfish act.

**Politically Involved:** Describes Fundamentalists as active participants in the political process. “Very politically involved” may be showing activities such as lobbying congress, attempting to influence elections or bills in Congress. “Somewhat involved” shows Fundamentalists participating in the American political process such as voting or distributing voter information pamphlets. “A little politically involved” shows Fundamentalists staying in tune with political actions, keeping themselves informed or preaching on political matters. “Not at all politically involved” shows the separationistic tendencies, such as refusing to vote or denouncing politics in general as being anti-religion or to be held strictly apart from religious convictions.

**Violent:** Desiring/capable of rendering destruction to persons or objects; prone to damage people or things more than an average person. “Very violent” means actions of violence were attempted or accomplished. “Somewhat violent” involves threats or insinuations that Fundamentalists are dangerous to society. “A little violent” means Fundamentalists are portrayed as wishing violence on others, without necessarily connecting that desire to their own actions. “Not at all violent” would portray Fundamentalists as pacifists or people willing to be greatly hurt themselves before ever wishing to fight back or return “an eye for an eye.” The provoked measurement helps determine whether the violence of Fundamentalists was provoked by some other actions or if it sprung up on its own due to their religious convictions.

### **Section 5: Thermometer Data**

**Thermometer Data:** The thermometer rating involves the general impression the news clip leaves with a reader. From 50 to 100 ratings are if the news clip leaves one feeling

“warm” toward Fundamentalist Christians, whereas 50 to 0 means the news clip leaves one feeling “cold” or “cool” toward them. It may be helpful to think of the scale divided into quarters, where the bottom and top 25 percent are those news clips that are more extreme and were easy to categorize (more explicit in their endorsement/derogation of Fundamentalist Christians). Also, think of 50 as a perfectly balanced news clip, which is difficult to obtain, and 0 and 100 should be reserved for the few newscasts that are the warmest/coldest toward Fundamentalist Christians.

### **Section 6: General Focus**

**Economic:** The primary subject of the newscast is about finances or wealth, with only incidental mentioning of other subjects.

**Social:** Includes issues relevant to society, from public education to road improvements.

**Political:** Include all newscasts that are primarily concerned with politics, i.e., voting/candidates/how politics are being pressured/persuaded, lobbying force etc.

**Human Interest:** This category involves personal stories, where the newscast is focused on one person or a few persons and chronicles their history or some of their experiences. These newscasts are typically more subjective in nature, and often try to give you insight into the character or mind of an individual.

**Religious:** The primary focus is on religion/faith. This category can be used when the newscast seems to be difficult to determine because it is a blending of a lot of religion with very little of another category or categories. Stories may focus on denominations, religious schools or persons or some sort of doctrinal stance a particular group adopts/is defending.

**Other:** Any other clear category not mentioned above, or newscasts that barely mention religion but don't fit into any other category neatly either.

### **Section 7: Overall Portrayal**

**Video/Audio Together:** The last variable involves dividing the overall impression left by the video, audio and mixed data. This information assists to show more precisely which elements are portraying Fundamentalists in which ways. These distinctions can be made by first viewing the news clip with both video and audio, then listening to the video



only (looking away from the television), and finally turning off the sound and viewing the visuals alone.